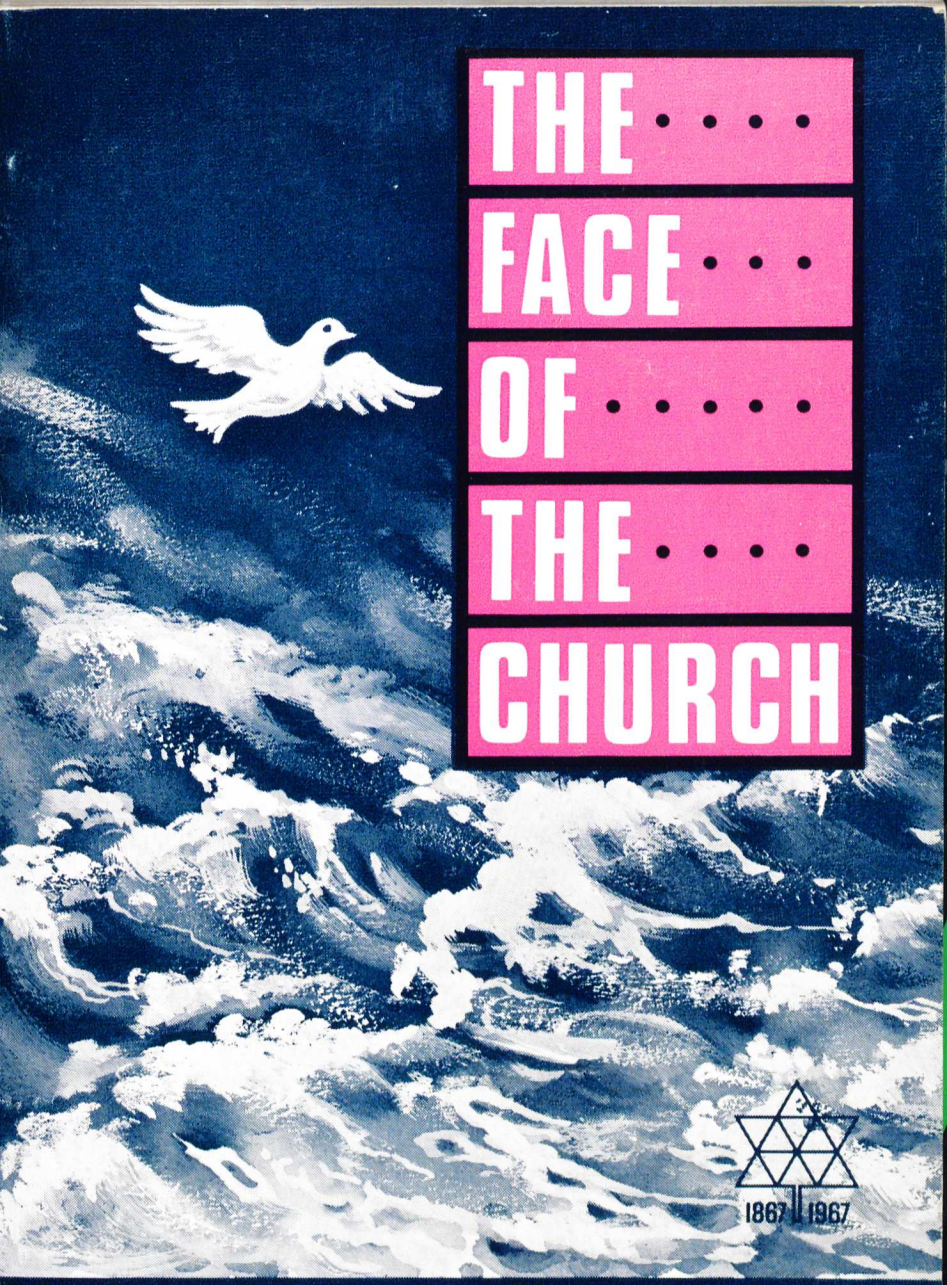
THE FACE OF THE CHURCH



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A Book of Sermons

THE FACE OF THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book is the third in a trilogy of books published by The Centennial Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The first book, *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada* by N. G. Smith, A. L. Farris, and H. K. Markell attempted a brief but comprehensive survey of the Presbyterian Church in Canada from its earliest beginnings to the present time. The second book, *Enkindled by the Word*, is a series of biographical sketches and historical studies of persons or groups who contributed significantly to the development of our Church. It was intended to focus more sharply upon the lives of those who helped give shape to our Church's past and present identity.

When this publishing project was first discussed it was the hope of the Committee that a third book would seek to discover and describe the present ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. No one seemed to be prepared to undertake such a formidable task in the short time at our disposal and so this ambitious scheme had regretfully to be abandoned. The Committee, however, feeling perhaps that "half a loaf is better than none" decided to publish a book of sermons from representative ministers in our Church which would at least indicate the kind of pulpit work that was being done at this juncture of our Church's history.

The title which the Committee had in mind for the more ambitious project was *"The Face of the Church"*. We decided after some discussion to retain this title since an examination of pulpit utterances would be integral to any attempt to get at the contemporary ethos of our Church. To discover the "face of the Church" would of course involve such things as an examination of the findings and proceedings of Church Courts, Boards and Committees; the activities of congregations and the reaction, or lack of reaction, of the Church people to the various and contemporary social issues. However it must be remembered that the men in our pulpits provide a large portion of the membership on the Boards and Committees of the Church, and their utterances from the pulpit are probably related in some measure to their decisions in Church courts and committees. In spite of the present downgrading of the office of the ministry it is still possible for ministers of character and courage to shape significantly congregational activities. Their sensitivity moreover to the problems confronting their people is also reflected in their sermons and some indication of the nature of those problems may be possible by an analysis of the sermons. Thus it may be argued with some cogency that something of

the character of the Church may be ascertained by means of sermon analysis, and some outline of the Church's face, however fuzzy in spots, may be seen from the topics that exercise our preachers' minds.

Not only will the publication of sermons such as these help us to identify ourselves as Canadian Presbyterians in this centennial year but they may also provide for the future church historian some indication of the preaching and the thinking of one Canadian Church in this revolutionary and crisis filled period in our nation's history. Books like these become basic documents for the future historian as he (or she) seeks to interpret the outlook and the practice of the Church against her contextual background.

These sermons, furthermore, are an extension of the pulpit work of some of our able ministers and are capable still of fulfilling their primary function which was to instruct the mind, strengthen faith, and give direction to the will. In other words they were not intended to become historical documents, or interpretative data, but rather sermons through which the Word of God could be heard in all His quickening and renewing power.

The sermons are a selection from a number of sermons that were kindly submitted for consideration. In inviting ministers to submit manuscripts the Committee had in mind the shades of theological opinion current in our Church, the variety of academic backgrounds, and the disparity in age that is characteristic of any church's ministry. The Committee wishes to acknowledge its indebtedness to all those who responded to our invitation to submit manuscripts. We regret that a selection finally had to be made and not all could be published.

Finally a word of appreciation must be expressed to Mr. Ian MacEachern of Presbyterian Publications for unfailing courtesy and helpfulness in the publishing, not only of this modest book, but also its two predecessors, *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada*, and *Enkindled By The Word*.

Easter 1967

Allan L. Farris
Knox College
Toronto

I

FAITH AND THE FUTURE

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Text: "Now faith gives substance to our hope. It is the conviction that the things we do not see are real." Hebrews 11:1

PROBABLY this is the only verse in the whole letter to the Hebrews with which we are all fairly familiar. It stands out for us as one of the few memorable definitions of faith in the New Testament. Sometimes we make a little more of it than the author intended, because he never planned that it should in any way be a final definition of faith. It is rather a limited definition of faith; limited because this is the one aspect of faith his readers most needed to hear. Indeed, the text itself is not very helpful in any attempt to understand what faith is — since it simply describes faith as conviction, which amounts to defining one abstraction with another. In order that content might be put into that definition, the text needs to be examined in the light of its context. Then one discerns that the text has at least two very specific things to say about faith as conviction.

We discover first that faith as conviction leads to action. It involves commitment.

This is what we learn about faith as conviction from the immediate context of our text. The whole of Chapter 11 is really a description of men who live by this kind of faith; men who believed in the reality of God, men who believed in the validity of the promises which they understood he had made to them. They were prepared, therefore, to bring their lives into conformity with those convictions. They were prepared if necessary to turn their backs on the accepted standards of their day, on the criteria by which

men might judge a life to be worth while; criteria involving financial status, prestige in the community, public approval. Whatever the criteria might be, whatever might be its motivation, they did not judge themselves to be held by it, to be bound by it. They felt bound only by this faith. Their norms of conduct were born of this faith. This meant that on occasion they would have to turn their backs upon the standards of conduct which might be normative for their day. They might be called upon to live their lives in accordance with a completely different set of values. Faith understood as conviction meant that for them the thing that really mattered was not public approval but divine approval. It was not financial security, but obedience to God.

Faith emerges in the light of our text as indicating not simply believing something which is contrary to the evidence but obeying regardless of the difficulties. The result for those who hold this conviction, then and now, is the experience of a new kind of freedom; freedom from the presuppositions of their day; freedom from the standards which were commonly accepted; freedom from the norms by which men ordinarily lived their lives.

One of the most serious charges against the Church in our day is the charge of worldliness. The Church has often been charged with this, but to-day this charge of worldliness is just a little different. It doesn't have anything to do with the usual sectarian view of worldliness which understands separation at its most superficial level. It is a much more serious charge to the effect that the Church lives by the same standards as society. One prominent historian in our day suggests that the Church has "rewritten the religious vision to give sacred sanction to a way of life that we have been forced into and must somehow find morally acceptable." But the challenge that comes to us out of faith understood as conviction is that we do not live our lives according to the accepted norms, but that when necessary we may turn our back upon these things, certain that the things that really matter are the things which are not seen, and which therefore are not ordinarily normative in the living of our lives. Faith as conviction involves us in a way of life whose rules are not determined by the presuppositions, or the axioms of our society. They are determined by the Gospel; the Gospel which tells us of the Christ who refused to conform to the norms of his day, but lived according to the will and mind of God.

I do not know whether you have ever watched the CBC programme 'Wojeck.' In one of its episodes it took a look ostensibly at the use of the

drug L.S.D. on the campus of a Canadian University. One of the students belongs to a group that is experimenting with this drug. This particular student can establish no rapport with his parents — especially his father. The father cannot understand the son's apparent indifference to all the luxuries which now he could offer him. And so he has a long conversation in which he tries to tell the boy the facts of life. He tries to convince this boy that if he is going to get along in this world, he must recognize one simple, elementary truth; that the world by and large is made up of buyers and sellers. That's all there is to it; just buyers and sellers, nothing more, nothing less. It's a simple matter of economics. To recognize this rudimentary fact of life is then to be able to get along in this world. He will be able to live in this jungle which constitutes society. It's a simple matter of buying and selling.

But the son cannot buy it. The son is convinced that surely there must be something else to life than buying and selling. So he turns his back upon his father's world. There must be more to life than this, and he tries to find it in terms of L.S.D. This is what does so often happen. Young people turn their back upon our world because it just simply isn't a meaningful world. They turn their back upon it and seek substitutes for that world; sometimes constructive substitutes like concern for civil rights; sometimes destructive substitutes like various forms of anti-social behaviour.

Christian faith is a conviction that reality has to do with Jesus Christ; with the claims which he makes upon us; with obedience to Him.

But this kind of faith, understood thus as conviction, also makes us open to the will of God in the present and the future.

The letter to the Hebrews has little apparent contact with our world. Its language is strange and its references foreign. Small wonder indeed, for its theme is borrowed from the tabernacle cultus.[1] Not the temple cultus, mark you, but the tabernacle cultus. The primary characteristic of the tabernacle and the tabernacle cult was mobility. This cultus represented the people of God on the move. They were moving forward in response to the call and the challenge of God; in obedience to his will and his leadership. The temple, on the other hand, represented the people of God settling down. The temple represented the institutionalizing of the faith of Israel.

You may remember that in his defense prior to his martyrdom

[1] Cf. Wm. Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews,* Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1957.

Stephen reviews the history of the people of Israel. His review emphasizes the mobility of God's people. The note of judgment enters when they decide to settle down and build a temple. The Most High, he says, does not dwell in temples made with hands. This cannot be used as an argument against the building of churches, but rather represents a judgment against the institutionalizing of religion. When we institutionalize religion then what was intended to be a means becomes in itself an end, and what was intended to be an instrument of service becomes the object of service.

It has been suggested that the theme of Stephen's defense, with its emphasis on the mobility of God's people, has been borrowed by the writer of this letter to the Hebrews — and indeed has been incorporated into our text and illustrated in this familiar eleventh chapter. Faith makes the people of God always open to the present and to the future, sensitive to the will of God for the moment, ever ready to follow and obey in the here and now. We do not ordinarily think of conviction in these terms. We usually think that conviction is rooted in the past and is somewhat suspicious of anything that is new. This is not true for conviction, but it is true for institutionalism. The process of institutionalizing is a familiar one. The idea is born, then in order that the idea might be promoted the institution with its organization is founded. It is founded to promote the idea and to preserve the idea. Then in due course the means becomes an end, and the idea becomes the tool of the institution. But the Gospel does not allow itself so to be buried. The Gospel continually breaks the bonds of institutionalism and in the process renews the institution. God's people are never allowed to settle down. The Gospel disturbs, eliminates complacency, promotes mobility. The Gospel makes us open always to the present and the future. The Gospel is a form of shingles; it rubs our nerves raw so that we become screamingly sensitive to the needs and the opportunities of the moment. It reminds us over and over again, as we are tempted to look to the past, or as we are tempted to look within, that the proper stance of God's people is towards the present and to the future.

The church as institution is under attack in our day. We are slowly being dis-established. We may never have thought that we were established until we began to see our privileges nibbled away one by one. We see it in terms of the outcry against religious education in the public schools. We see it in the suggestion that churches ought to suffer from all the taxes to which all other mortals are heir. We cannot help but notice the process of dis-establishment whereby the church as institution is constantly losing

its privileges. It would be tempting to fight back. It would be tempting to try to hang on to all these privileges. But we can't do so if we take faith seriously. For to live by this faith means that the Church of Christ must live off the resources of the Gospel. Basically it has no other resources. Maybe when the day comes that we can no longer teach religious education in the public schools we shall take more seriously the task of Christian Education within the local congregation — and wouldn't that be an excellent thing? Maybe when the time comes that society makes divorce a simple matter of a mutual declaration of dissolvement, then perhaps the Church will have to take more seriously this whole matter of training people in what it means to understand marriage in Christian terms — and wouldn't that be an excellent thing? Maybe if we are going to discover that the so-called new morality is to be accepted by society round about us we shall have to take more seriously as a Church the task of instructing our young people in what it means to live in accordance with the mind of Christ — and wouldn't that be an excellent thing? There is no escapism for us into the past because then the present will pass us by. There is no escape for us by turning within because again the present will pass us by. There is only one time for service and that is the present. There is only one place of service, and that is the world in which God himself has placed us.

This is the day of opportunity, because to-day perhaps in a peculiar way God is teaching us what faith is; that faith is confidence in the things we hope for; that faith is assurance in the things we cannot see. And perhaps again to-day, in a peculiar way, God is teaching us what faith does. It constrains us to turn our back on all the securities that men hold dear, to turn our back upon the past, to turn our face to the future with all its insecurities because the future belongs to God.

II

THE MAN WHO FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE IN GOD

Rev. Murdo Nicolson, M.A., D.D.,
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Text: "The father of the child cried out and said with tears, I believe, help my unbelief." St. Mark 9:24

HOLIDAYING in California some time ago, and through the strangest chain of circumstances, I ran into an old friend whom I had not seen in years. By this time he had achieved high distinction in his profession as one of the outstanding nuclear scientists in North America. We spent a couple of pleasant hours reminiscing over the past, talking of people and places we had known, and then when the time came for him to leave he asked me to do him a favour — of all things *to conduct family worship*! I suppose I must have gaped in sheer astonishment for he went on, "And you don't have to look so surprised! True, I never used to be much interested in religion, as you know. But these last two years I have done quite a bit of thinking with the result that — well, let me put it like this: do you remember the story about a man who said, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief? That's where I am now."

That friend of mine is the modern counterpart of this man in the Gospel story whom I have described as one who found it hard to believe in God. Many people share the same difficulty. Unbelief may have its reasons, let us never forget, reasons to be understood and respected. For one thing, the prevailing intellectual climate may not be conducive to faith. Such is certainly the case today. Or again, having regard to the problem of pain and evil in the world, it is by no means obvious that God is, or if He is, that He cares about people and what happens to them. Even as

an academic question the enigma of pain permits of no easy answer, and less so when pain strikes close to home. Tragedy can strike blindly, capriciously, apparently with brutal and senseless indifference, breaking the heart, sapping our courage, till it seems as though the light of the sun had gone out. Would we then find it easy to believe in God? So in general, the anguish of the world shouts its denial against the assertions of faith. That's the kind of world we live in. In the graphic words of C. S. Lewis, "There are worms in the belly, not just primroses in the woods." And we cannot but learn this poignant fact when anguish comes knocking on our own door.

I

All of which constitutes the first difficulty encountered by this man who found it hard to believe in God. His son (his only son possibly) is the victim of a cruel disease. The condition has persisted for years, ever since childhood. Every possible remedy has been tried but to no avail. Is it strange that with every failure hope should die a little, with every disappointment faith should become more and more difficult?

Further, there is the unbelief of others — always a factor to be reckoned with. According to the story, this poor man brings his problems to the disciples at a time when they find themselves on their own, alone except for a crowd of curious onlookers and the unwelcome presence of the hostile scribes. You can picture the scene, the disciples looking dubiously at the boy, then at one another and each of them thinking, "Now, what would Jesus do if He were here?" Egged on by derisive words of encouragement from their enemies, the disciples do the best they can. I suppose they prayed about the situation, maybe tried with the best authority they could muster to exorcise the evil spirit, but it all ends in dismal failure. Then come the heartless taunts and jeers, the hoots of laughter. Tell me, with so much against him, what *can* the wretched man do? Little wonder he found it hard to believe in God.

Let's think about that for a moment. Scepticism likes to pass itself off as cool-headed. More often it appears to me to be singularly cold-hearted. After all, didn't the scribes realize that this was their problem too — theirs as much as anyone else's? A sorely tried and bewildered man appears with his problem, seeking help. What have they to say to him? In *God Our Contemporary*, J. B. Phillips makes some very cogent criticisms of the "cosy, uncommitted agnostic". "Why", he demands to know, "are works of compassion nearly always left to a mere handful of people operating on a shoe-string budget? The cosy agnostic, since he is

uncommitted, is free to give or withhold himself as he pleases. He feels under no obligation to touch or be touched by the evil he deplores."[2] Responsible to no one, he therefore considers himself free to criticize the Church while he himself chooses to stand aloof. Occasionally, it is true, he may spit against the heavens, curse and shake his fist in the face of the Almighty, and fulminate most eloquently against this ramshackle world, all of which contributes exactly nothing toward the remedying of the world's anguish.

What has the supercilious sceptic to say to this man in his desperate plight? To the young woman who in hopelessness prepares to leap to her death? To the young man who, after looking into the lovely face of a girl he had known back home, stumbles down a side street, rests his face against the rough wall of a building and says, "O God, if I could only die"? To the young, distracted mother torn to pieces by the death of her child, who takes him by the lapels of his coat and says, "Tell me, where is my baby?" Go on, Mr. Sceptic! Suppose you go ahead and tell her!

Returning to our story, what is this poor man to do do with the sneers and snickers of unbelievers sounding in his ears? Will that help solve his problems? Or rekindle hope in his heart? Or help him to believe in God? Similarly, we must not ignore the prevailing scepticism of our own age. It supplies a potent reason why many people today find it hard to believe in God.

Then, too, we have to remember the ignominious failure of the disciples. You can't rule that out, then or now. In his account of the incident Matthew relates how the disciples later asked Christ why they had failed. "Because of your unbelief," was the simple and revealing answer. This might well give us pause. I haven't a doubt but that the Church today is also in a measure responsible for the fact that many people find it hard to believe in God. Considering the relative impotence of the Church; the absence of deep commitment in both pulpit and pew; our hesitancies and lukewarmness; the absurdity of our present day theological confusion; a message that lacks conviction and a witness devoid of authority — little wonder, let me say again, that so many people find it hard to believe in God. Do we believe, let us ask ourselves, *really* believe in Christ's power to help and heal and save?

The public humiliation of the disciples, the jeering of their enemies, and this poor man with his heartbreak caught in the middle — thus the curtain falls on the first act of the drama.

[2] J. B. Phillips, *God Our Contemporary*, MacMillan, 1960.

II

Then Christ appears and the curtain rises for the second act. But for His coming there would have been no second act at all, just one of the saddest stories ever told. But He has His own wonderful way of transforming this or any similar situation. I care not how tragic, how seemingly hopeless, things may appear — bring in the love and grace of Jesus Christ and that situation can be reversed, light for darkness and hope for despair.

As the action proceeds from this point it is instructive to note how Christ dealt with the matter in hand.

First, we should note how the action narrows down until it involves only two people, Christ and this man with his problem. At the outset the stage is crowded: we have also the multitude of onlookers, the disciples shamefaced and abashed, the scribes mocking their discomfiture. But in the end the spotlight focuses on these two in their face-to-face encounter — an "I — thou encounter" as our modern existentialists like to put it. I hesitate to say that Christ simply bypassed all the others, scribes and disciples alike, as if they hardly counted. Nevertheless, the fact remains that He did. As for the disciples, perhaps the best that can be said is that, had they not been there, Christ would not have been there either; and when He comes not even their failure can thwart the operation of His saving power. So, as a salutary rebuke for the Church's pride, and not less as a helpful encouragement in her weakness and ineptitude, be it remembered that Christ comes where His disciples are and works mightily despite all their short-comings. But in the end, when Christ has business with you and you with Him, the time must come when you know infallibly that He addresses you — you as an individual. Addresses you? More, you must know that He loves you, that for you He was born, lived, died and rose again, that He is your Lord and your Saviour. Then you stand face to face with Him in the greatest encounter that life can hold for any one of us.

Don't you like the way Christ treated this man, so sympathetically and graciously, trying to put him at his ease? "Tell me all about it", He says. We have agreed upon the therapeutic value of simply talking about our problems. In any case we have to talk about them in order to know what we are dealing with. For a while this man does his best to give a reasoned account of the situation, a sort of case history of his boy's illness. Then, reminded of all the pain and disappointment he has known, he gives

expression to his anguish in the pitiful plea, "Lord, if thou canst do anything, please help us."

Now listen carefully to the answer. With gentle but unmistakable insistence Christ says to him, "If *I* can do anything? You have the IF in the wrong place. It's not a question of my power to save, but a question of your willingness to believe. That's where the IF belongs. *If* you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Why this insistence on faith, not just here but everywhere in Scripture? I think the answer lies in these directions. First, faith is one's grateful and appropriate response to God in Christ, the opening of heart and life to His love and power. Without that, how can God help us any more than you can feed someone who keeps his mouth tightly clenched, or speak to someone who refuses to listen, or show him something if he insists on keeping his eyes closed? Then again, as Paul says, God's salvation is of faith that it might be of grace. And also it is of faith that it might be for everyone. So the Christian Gospel asks us first and last not so much to *do* something as to *believe* something. It says to us, What of your response to the incredible love of God? Are you willing to trust God? To live by faith in God? To believe that Christ has redeemed you? To rest your every hope on His redemptive self-giving on the Cross and the power of His resurrection? Are you willing, in response to the Gospel, to believe?

Having in mind all the disappointment this man had known in the past and the painful experience through which he had just come, his reaction should be perfectly understandable. He finds himself in conflict. To make the venture of faith or sink back into disbelief? Such is the question he must settle. Only one devoid of compassion can fail to appreciate what the struggle for faith must have meant to him — to this man who found it hard, for obvious reasons, to believe in God. He reaches his agonized decision as he cries, "Lord, I believe" and then is compelled to add, "Help Thou my unbelief".

What do you think of that? Perhaps you feel it was no great confession of faith, this intermingling of faith and doubt, of belief and unbelief? It is hardly on a par with the magnificent faith of another who came to Christ with a fairly similar request and said, "Speak but the word and my servant shall be healed". But let this at least be said on the man's behalf, it was an honest confession of faith, and more, a confession of faith that Christ deemed acceptable. I'm not sure that I altogether agree with Dr. George Butterick in his so sweeping and all-inclusive statement,

"What of those who, in our sceptical time, cannot yet accept the testimony? Or of all of us in our times of God-forsakenness? *All of us* is the rightful phrase, for we should not divide our world into believers and doubters; we should be honest enough to confess that faith-doubt tension that troubles every man, so that every man must pray, if he prays, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." But, substantially, I think he is quite right. Let this much at least be conceded, that faith often does live in tension.

Still, faith may find authentication in experience, never forget that! If, at the moment, this man can only say, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief" you should have heard him five minutes later!

III

HOW CAN WE SPEAK OF GOD?

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Text: John 1:18; 3:11

LET us begin with a different question. Do we speak of God? Some people do, much and often. Some people expect ministers to speak of God, especially in churches, on Sundays. It is quite another matter for ministers to speak of God in homes on week-days. Other people are hesitant or uneasy speaking about God. Others, again, do not speak of God because they cannot. So how is it that some folk do not speak of God, or very little, while others do? And those who do speak of God, what grounds have they for speaking as they do?

History tells of many religions, many kinds of religion. Most religions have a supreme being, or beings. Don't forget the plural. Only three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have one single God. The others have many gods and many goddesses. Each god, or goddess, has his or her own definite character, and must be worshipped and served accordingly. But no two religions speak of the gods, and goddesses, in the same way. Many of these beings are just like magnified human beings, with human virtues and vices, also magnified. Man seems to have a deep feeling of spirits and beings, superior to himself, but when he has tried to describe these beings the results have been the reflection of his own ideas in his particular situation, and the projection of his own desires and needs. As a consequence the story of religion tells of many deities, some of them strange, some fantastic, and some hideous.

This kind of thing in religion is far off and remote to us. But the Old Testament writers were very aware of it, for they lived in the midst of it. There is a passage in the book of Isaiah (44:9-20) which describes a man making his idol. He selects and cuts down a suitable tree. He warms himself with some of it, he roasts his meat with some of it, and then he worships a piece of it, which he has made into his god. The passage ends with the indignant comment that the idol maker is too blind to know what he has done. It was absurd to this man of Israel that a man should bow down in worship to an image which he had just made from a tree-trunk.

In Psalm 96 the statement is made that "all the gods of the peoples are idols." The Hebrew word for "idol" means "a thing of nothing". These two passages express the view-point of the Old Testament. Idols are things of nothing. So the question arises: in a world of peoples who worshipped all kinds of idols, how did the Israelites come to have such strong feelings against idols?

Let us go a step further. The Old Testament not only denounces the gods of the peoples as idols, it also makes some very definite claims for the God of Israel. He is the creator of the ends of the earth. He is the redeemer of Israel. He is a God full of compassion and gracious, righteous, plenteous in mercy. He is a God of truth, goodness, faithfulness, loving-kindness, tender mercies and judgment. Again, we cannot miss the intensely personal feelings of trust and certainty and gratitude as expressed in Psalms 23, 51 and 103. How real this God is to these men! Many of these ways of speaking about God have their counterparts in other places in the Old Testament, and especially in the books of the prophets. What a tremendous gulf of contrast there is between this way of thinking of God and surrounding peoples' ways of thinking of their gods and goddesses. So now the further question arises. How did these people of Israel come to speak of God in this definite and deeply personal way? How could they speak of God like this?

The answer is that Israel knew God in this way because of God's activity in history on her behalf. The decisive event in the history of Israel is the deliverance from Egypt. The Hebrews were slaves in Egypt, and God had intervened in behalf of these oppressed people; he had redeemed them to be his chosen people. Again and again the Old Testament goes back in wonder and gratitude to this deliverance from Egypt. In other and later events, and throughout the course of Israel's history, God guided and kept his people, saving them as well

as judging them. In their ongoing life God showed himself in his dealings with Israel to be this kind of God, holy and faithful and full of compassion. When the various peoples around Israel thought of their gods and goddesses in the way they did, is it possible that Israel just imagined their God to be so different? God made himself known to Israel as this kind of God. On this basis the Old Testament writers wrote and spoke so definitely of him.

Now we ask the next question. How did the early Christians speak of God? For the answer to this we will go to the New Testament letters which were sent to Christian churches and individuals. For the first Christians, as for the Psalm writers, God is holy and faithful and merciful and gracious, only much more so. God is the God of all comfort, and the God of all grace. To be brief and to the point, we may quote three short sentences, each from a different part of the letters:

> "God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 RSV)
>
> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, . . ."
>
> (I Peter 1:3 RSV)
>
> "In this the love of God was manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world, so that we might live through him."
>
> (I John 4:9 RSV)

These are only a few of the many statements about God that could be given from the New Testament. How did the Christians come to think of God in this way?

The answer is plain: Jesus Christ. Did you notice that Jesus Christ has an essential part in each of those three quotations? God shows his love in this, that Christ died for sinful men. And so with the others. The thinking of the first Christians about God was all tied up to Jesus Christ. They couldn't think of God without thinking of Jesus Christ. For them God was "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". In the first chapter of John's Gospel it is stated that no one has ever seen God at any time, but the only Son (who is Jesus Christ), who is in the closest relationship with God, has made him known. The key to God's mind and heart and purpose was Jesus Christ. Who Jesus was, and what he did, his life and death and resurrection were all a revelation

of God to the early Christians. They spoke of God in the way they did because in Jesus Christ they saw God the Father.

But more has to be said here. It is a fact that many who saw Jesus in the flesh and heard him speak did not find in him any revelation of God, did not connect him with God at all. On the contrary, some of these believed that Jesus was possessed by an evil spirit, while others were convinced he was a blasphemer. How are we to understand this difference of mind about Jesus?

When Jesus first approached men with the call to follow him he was asking them to take up toward him a certain personal relationship involving trust and obedience. Some took him at his word, and entered into this relationship. It was in this personal relationship that they came to know him. They had responded in faith to Jesus' call, and it was given to them to know him, and to know God through him. There were others, as we have seen, who refused to have anything to do with Jesus, and the result was they never really knew him.

How can we speak of God? The men of Old Testament times could speak of God because God made himself known to them in his mighty acts on behalf of Israel — for her salvation and for her witness to God before the nations. The first Christians could speak of God because they knew Him in Jesus Christ, the greatest of all God's acts. As Christians we are in this amazing succession. We, too, can speak of God because we, too, have come to know Him in his mighty acts, above all in Jesus Christ. We can use of ourselves the words which Christ uttered in his conversation with Nicodemus: "we speak of what we know."

IV

ST. PAUL ON CAMPUS

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Text: Acts 17:16-34

ST. PAUL'S visit to Athens and his speech on Mars' Hill is very much like a modern university situation in which one tries to preach the Gospel. Today we must face the problem of "Church and University" with no holds barred, recognizing the seriousness of our alienation and the urgency of communication.

The large open area below the Acropolis in Athens was the campus. The arches or Stoa surrounding it gave the name to Stoic philosophy. Its Court of Areopagus had sentenced Socrates to death some 450 years before Paul's visit, because the wise man's teaching had corrupted the youth by questioning traditional religious and political values. Here, men spent all their time discussing new learning, and invited visitors to express their point of view. It was the typical University set-up. This is the first thing to see, this situation of talking, of bull sessions and free expression and youthful zest for novelty and also much cynical judgment and opinion.

Today's University is like that, except that we have entered a new age, a new period in history. The Church, being traditional and conservative, usually waits until the newness is forced on her; but things are moving so quickly these days that it is time for the church to deliberately measure the age which is ours in God's providence. It has been called many things; perhaps the two names of "post-modern" and "post-Christian" express best its peculiar quality. We may view Western culture according to four periods in its history. First was the classical age, when man

believed in the power of reason to provide meaning for life. Then came the Christian era, symbolized by the medieval unity of faith and reason. Third was the scientific age, when coherence and security were sought from Nature.

Now that has gone. For some fifty years and more a new world-view has struggled towards the light, through the birth-pangs of two world wars, of new mathematical physics of relativity, the findings of social science, and the impact of communism and eastern religions. Gone are the certainties of our fathers: truth has become so complex, so related to time and place, so tentative and questing that we cannot see the woods for the trees. Religion is no longer the answer, it has become part of the question.

A similar analysis comes from the theologian Paul Tillich. He sees three stages in Christian history, each presenting a different answer from the Gospel as the age made its demands. At first the classic problem was the fact of *death,* and the early church gave its clear message of resurrection and new life.

Then the problem shifted to *guilt,* to which the medieval church provided answer in terms of forgiveness and satisfaction through faith and works. So did the Reformation, which gave its own distinctive answer to a medieval question.

Today the problem is still different: not death, not guilt, but *meaninglessness.* Is there any meaning, any purpose in human existence? that is our question.

Do we need to illustrate the point? In our music and our dance, in our literature and our theatre, in our politics and our economics, everything seems disjointed, relative only to ourselves, without absolutes. We search for "something of value", we try everything . . . take your choice: the theatre of the absurd or the beatnik writers, the new jazzmen or the realist movies, the big sound in music or the new mysticism of LSD. We sit around waiting for Godot who never comes. We take a streetcar named Desire headed for the Elysian fields, but end up in insanity. We blow as sweet as Charlie "Bird" Parker, but only the "pot" makes sense, and we die at 34. We are naked and the dead, the outsiders, little boys castaway on an unknown island offering one another in sacrifice to the Lord of the Flies.

At University, all this becomes more sinister, because of the sharp increase of knowledge — our factual knowledge is apparently doubling every decade! It is no longer possible to be a "universal man" — not even

in the Philosophy Department (even if philosophers wanted to any more). University has become "multi-versity".

How can modern man find meaning in a universe so vast, so complex, so elusive of our grasp? Can he do anything except explore its mystery in a partial and tentative way? Like the girlfriend of the college boy who dutifully accompanied him to a lecture on quantum physics . . . when asked how she liked it, she exclaimed: "It was wonderful! I'm still confused, but on a much higher level"!

The best thing seems to be to roll with the punches. Scrounge around for some security; be angry and rebellious but watch out for Number One. The chief question is: what do I get out of it? Religion included — our image is not a pretty one on campus. We've made the Gospel into a Big Sell, and hawk our wares in a painfully obvious way. (Is it significant that the "world's foremost Evangelist" was once a Fuller Brush salesman?)

In such a situation of meaninglessness and scepticism, many turn to science for a measure of assurance, and to the scientific method applied to the human situation: "human engineering" will solve our problems. But in either case — the scepticism or the scientism — belief in God seems a curious preoccupation for modern man. Either he wants a God to provide meaning, a Man Upstairs, "always ready to forgive", in a word "good old God"; or he "needs" God only now and then, to bridge the gaps not yet filled in by science.

Better still, he may have progressed to the place where "God" is the symbol for an Absolute, a vague deity beyond all human names for God. That was what Paul found at Athens long ago. The altar inscribed 'To the Unknown God' (the Greek word is *agnostos*) may have been erected by simple folk anxious not to miss any touchy deity among the many in whom they believed; or more likely, it was the work of the sophisticated University crowd, who thus proclaimed the "god above all gods". Such is "the power of negative thinking", very important in theology. But Paul jumped in right here and warned that negative thought is good only if it gets you somewhere — to the positive, God the living and the true, revealed in Jesus Christ. Otherwise it degenerates into superstition, dealing with substitute deities.

Please note that *doubt* itself is not a bad thing. At University we are called to doubt, by God who is the Truth; perhaps we have a "vocation" to doubt! For the very act of thinking involves doubt — the process of analysis means criticism, death and new birth of ideas. The

word came originally from the ancient mystery-religions, in which the god was "torn apart" or crucified — "analysed". For those who have eyes to see, is not such sceptical enquiry a showing forth of Christ's death and resurrection?

If we really believe, with Calvin and Knox and the best of the Christian tradition, that the whole world is "under God", a theatre for his glory, then we will rejoice that there is a responsibility and integrity possible for the University. We will help the campus to be itself, and not expect it to turn into a Sunday School.

The trouble is, our fathers as well as most other Christians lost that vision. They turned the good news of Christ's lordship over all things into the bad news that he rules only in heaven. They became pessimists about man and his world, his knowledge and achievements, his potential. A mutual distrust crept in between church and university. Therefore before criticising the university, let us be self-critical. We are so ready to be critics of all kinds of things — communism and secularism and immorality and not-going-to-church; but so loath to see ourselves in our shallowness and selfcentredness and pharisaism. We build ourselves into religious ghettoes, so afraid of something called "worldliness", forgetting that Jesus was condemned and crucified by his religious contemporaries for being just that! He shocked their churchly sensibilities by mixing with prostitutes and outcasts; he enjoyed a good stiff drink; he associated with publicans, the "fellow travellers" of his day! And although we talk incessantly about love and reconciliation, we are not truly brothers even among ourselves: we want truth without love, evangelism without sacrifice, ecumenicity without commitment. We are cheap gospellers.

That is the impression we are making on our generation, especially the young who seek for meaning, for a clear word of truth and challenge. Moreover, since so often we address today's world as if the old ways and beliefs still held, we do not get a hearing. Unless our words make sense to this kind of modern quest — for people who are not oppressed by guilt so much as meaninglessness — we put false stumbling-blocks in their way and do not let the real scandal of the Gospel get a hearing. For we pretend to know all about guilt and forgiving love, yet we teach that swearing and drinking are evil, but segregation, war and political corruption are inevitable! We confess that Jesus Christ is Lord every Sunday but like to run our own show in between. We claim he rose from the dead but act as if the Cross were God's last word. No wonder

we look merely silly to so many of our contemporaries! The offence of the cross is one thing; the silliness of Christians quite another.

In a time of waiting, our word must speak of hope. St. Paul did just that on the campus of his day: he spoke boldly of resurrection, of the new life proclaimed in the Gospel. The beat poet Ferlinghetti has written of our time: "I am waiting for a rebirth of wonder". He can still hope for Christ's reality to break through the tinsel trappings of our religiosity:

> Christ climbed down
> from his bare tree
> this year
> and softly stole away into
> some anonymous Mary's womb again
> where in the darkest night
> of everybody's anonymous soul
> He awaits again
> an unimaginable
> and impossibly
> Immaculate Reconception
> The very craziest
> of Second Comings.

The living Christ, a presence and a power here and now, a source of meaning for daily life and a happening for every seeker — that's the message. We need to shift the focus from *faith* (its nature, its dynamics, its possibility) to its *Object* (who he is, what he demands, the cost and the care he brings). While we are busy debating his existence and examining the alternatives, he is busy in another place. He waits too, but not where we think. That is the irony and the tragedy of our time: the waiting posture, the lament for a dead God, the anger at his silence — all these have some truth, and all can be turned to great gain. Our message is not an outright denial of the waiting game or the search for meaning, of the protest groups and the fun-seekers. Rather we have to show the unexpected stance of God, the surprising grace of the living Christ, who also waits and searches and protests and enjoys life. "Good news" is our message; nothing else.

Christ does not ask us to sacrifice our minds, to stop thinking and criticising and analysing; he bids us change the direction of our quest, the orientation and the goal. For one thing, he gives himself to be known in more than words, for he is involved in the drama called history

and in the event called community. And therefore he demands of us more than words — he who would know him must not cling to the isolation of the campus, the ghetto of thinking, but must "come out into the tempest of living" as Bonhoeffer put it. So our faith must take shape as event, as drama, a deed performed on the public stage, a movement towards *joy*. What else can we do, when he finds us? What else is fitting if not the joy, the laughter, the enjoyment of God and of man which is the heart of this Gospel?

God takes knowledge of us, analyses us, tears us apart and puts us back together — we are Humpty Dumpty and he performs the miracle. And as a result, we live now in a responsive, reactive way, his friends and servants and ambassadors. That is the spirit in which Paul ventured forth into an alien Empire, with too many religions and too little faith. If we could do as much, would not our modern age look and listen? On campus everybody is interested in new ideas; but the challenge and demand of the Gospel will get a hearing when it is backed up by human involvement and commitment, by joy and by love. And is not the campus a reflection of our time, a piece of our world today in its burgeoning powers and its confused search and its desperate waiting?

Is there a word for today, on campus and off? If we believe so, let us so speak and act that the Word will get a hearing, those who wait will begin to run, those who search will rejoice with us at the good news.

V

THE GRACE OF RENEWAL

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Text: "The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus which had made him whole." John 5:15

FAITH healing has always been a fascinating art. When you turn to the Bible, you find so much to kindle your interest, to spark your enthusiasm and to challenge your faith. The New Testament narratives claim for Jesus and the apostles a power to perform miracles of healing.

Some find in these claims an obstacle to faith. They stumble over the miracles, as it were, on the way to the Master. For myself, I have no real difficulty with the miracle stories. I see in Jesus the miracle of all miracles, the greatest event that has happened in history since the creation. Either he was something extraordinary or it was a mind bereft of all reason who made the claim, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth." Either Jesus could do what he claimed or there is a tragic hoax at the centre of those great and mystery-laden words. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Either Jesus could or he couldn't; either he can or he can't. I, for one, believe that He can. However, this does not prevent the mind from asking questions. It does not dispel the troubling doubts that come to disturb the soul.

There are two considerations that throw light upon our subject. The first is this, that in the New Testament the healing of the body is always a symbol or a sign of a greater power to heal, the power to heal the soul. Jesus leaves those whom he helps with the warning that something worse

than a physical infirmity can befall them. He speaks of a sickness which is unto death, a sickness of the soul.

John gives us a dramatic picture of Jesus' visit to the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. It is a pathetic picture, a scene of human misery and despair. He shows you a crowd of people, sick people, some blind, some lame, some paralyzed. They are waiting for a miracle of healing, a mysterious stirring of the water.

Why did the Evangelist include the record of this event in his narrative? What John wants you to see here is a symbol of our humanity, a people who are cut off from their real hope, their hope in God, a people for whom in a very real sense God is dead. He wants you to see a people without any real peace, peace with God, a people without any real light, the light that comes from God.

It doesn't take a very vivid imagination to see the parallel between that crowd of human misery and the world today. After all, are we not a people waiting for word of some miracle, some stirring of the water, something that will give us relief from the tensions of history and its anarchy, some assurance of peace, some miracle of brotherhood, some restoration of confidence and trust — not in the Great Society but in the Grand Scheme of things? In short, we live in a world where the lamp of hope is burning painfully low.

The second consideration is this, that it is all a matter of faith. "Why is it?" Jesus asks in a sort of hurt amazement, "Why is it that you have so little faith?" Jesus never ceased to marvel that men draw such little confidence and strength from their faith in God, that men fail to find through faith in God a spring of surging hope, undaunted courage and renewed strength.

He tells us that the kingdom of God is like a farmer who sows seed in his field and then goes about his other tasks. He leaves the seed to the soil and the economy of God. The seed comes to life and grows and when the farmer returns later, the harvest is ready for him. Jesus assures us that God is at work in his universe in a similar way. His appeal to men early and late was simply this, to have faith, to have faith in God, to have faith in his creative sustaining and ongoing purpose.

In Scripture's record of this event we are brought face to face with the question and the decision of faith. When Jesus visits the pool of Bethesda he finds a man waiting there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. It seems as though Jesus sought for the one who needed him most. If he could help any, he could help the worst. If he could reach any, he

could reach the lowest. If he could free any, he could free the one most securely bound.

The question he puts to the man seems strange. "Wilt thou be made whole?" The man had been waiting for years? Wasn't that the purpose of his being there? Why ask him if he wants to be made well?

Jesus was probing into the man's soul, his mental outlook. Perhaps he had long since given up the fight and his waiting was no more than a lingering death. Do you want to be made well? Perhaps he was seeking refuge from the demands of life and its duties through his handicap.

The man didn't evade the question. The will was there, the desire for wholeness. Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," and the Bible tells us that immediately the man was made whole.

Now this is the witness of the Bible to Jesus. Either you stumble here and turn back, or you believe and find help. You find the grace that renews, the grace that bridges our estrangement with reconciliation, smites our sin with forgiveness and dispels our fear of death with the promise of life.

The man in our story no sooner begins to walk, however, than he confronts the Jewish authorities and their charge that he is breaking the sabbath. Sometimes it is the church itself with its rigid orthodoxy, its slavery to custom, its set forms and its hallowed traditions which hinders Jesus in his work of renewal. Today the curtain which Christians have to break through is the "stained glass curtain", if we are to reach people and become the salt of the earth and light for the world in our time.

The man in the narrative was aware of an authority higher than the Pharisees. "The one who made me well, he it is who told me to take up my bed and walk." The man had recognized in Jesus a higher power. Yet when he was questioned he didn't know the name of the one who had healed him. How often that happens. It never ceases to amaze me how so many are always ready to honour the great benefactors of humanity, yet withhold from Jesus credit for all he has done, and for all that he has meant and for all that he means in human history. How often in life we forget what we owe this healing and renewing name. For example, when we are in hospital do we remember with thanksgiving that hospitals were first built, and the sick tended, in our part of the world, under the healing name of Jesus?

There is, however, a deeper issue. There are some who say that the church should keep its hands clean, stay away from such issues as the civil rights conflict in America, labour disputes, capital punishment.

Isn't it true that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty? Isn't it true that at the point where men are finding freedom or help, at that point where they are regaining the dignity which God gave them in the beginning, the church should be there, naming the name that truly helps and really renews. Or will we leave it to the Communists to tell the people of Africa and Asia that they owe their freedom and their life to Communism? Will we leave it for science to tell men they are dependent on the wonders of science alone to meet the new age? Will we leave it to education to tell our young people that reason alone is the true guide for the times in which we live? There is no time here to go into the disillusionment that lies at the end of such trails. Neither am I referring to any conflict between science and religion, faith and reason. I am simply relating facts.

Surely one of the points of the story of the healing at the pool is that the church should be there at the point of despair and hope, naming the only name that really helps, the name of him who comes with the grace of renewal, the name of Jesus.

Finally, the question that Jesus asks must be raised over all our churches and all our services and all our prayers. "Wilt thou be made whole?" The thirty-eight years, when we think of our churches, becomes quite relevant. Many have gathered for longer than that at the pools of grace in the church, without any signs of spiritual renewal. Do you really want to see God, do you really want your life to come under that sense of duty that burdens those who truly know the living God? Do you want to have with me and do I want to have with you those relations which are the deep and substantial relations of an authentic fellowship in Jesus Christ? Will you open your heart to me and will I open my heart to you with the openness which characterizes the friendship of Christ? "Wilt thou be made whole?"

The grace of renewal is nothing less than the renewal of your mind, the daring thought of Paul to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The gospel dares you to think about God with the confident thoughts of Christ. It dares you to think about others, your neighbours, your friends, your acquaintances, your competitors, your enemies with the thoughts of Christ. It dares you to think about yourself with the thoughts of Christ.

The grace of renewal is the new heart, the shining glory of the ancient promise. Will you let Jesus root out the harboured grievances, the petty jealousy, the dark prejudice and the sweet desire for revenge,

that you may look upon those around you with a compassion like the compassion of Christ?

You can almost sense in the Bible, Jesus at work in Peter's heart. He is enlarging it, pushing back its walls that it might be big enough and open enough and sensitive enough to be a vessel of his grace — that's the meaning of "Not seven times, Peter, but seventy times seven."

Do you really want your life to be renewed? Do you want to share in the renewal of the church and the renewal of life? That's the question the Bible places before you. Do you want in your own place some answer to the prayer "Oh, that that man might arise in me, that the man I am might cease to be!" If this is the desire of your heart, the thirst of your life, then this old story from the New Testament is about you. You can be the one who goes out to tell others that it was Jesus who set you on your feet and sent you marching through life in step with faith's joyful and triumphant music. You can bear witness to the truth that it was Jesus who made you whole.

* *The Peanuts' comic strip is herewith reproduced with the kind permission of the cartoonist Charles M. Schulz.*

VI

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SOMEONE

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Text: *"— and Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside, and he began to cry out, "Jesus, have mercy on me!"*
— and many told him to be silent
— but he cried out all the more —
and Jesus stopped" Mark 10:46-52

OSCAR Wilde wrote the delightful play entitled "The Importance of Being Earnest." Today, I would direct your thoughts to "The Importance of Being Someone."

Little Linus, from the Peanuts' Comic Strip,* is stating it so very well. Do you know what had happened? His big bad sister Lucy had just turned off the T.V. he was watching with the remark "I may as well turn this off — nobody is watching it." Little Linus obviously thinks otherwise. "I'm someone!" he cries out. But alas, to no avail. Nobody hears him.

Linus is stating the unheard cry of many people today in our impersonal world. How do you feel when a clerk in a large store brushes you off? What about the university student, as he finds himself a very small part of the complex multi-versity, and all that is required of him is to turn out a pass mark? What about the assembly line worker, the senior citizen in her one little room — upstairs? Each one, sometimes, wants to cry out, "I'm someone!"

In our complex society of today, we humans are occasionally simply numbers, to be jostled and manipulated and sometimes used.

Poor Bartimaeus — blind, no doubt dirty, doing the only thing he could — sitting by the roadside, begging — holding out his hand, waiting for a generous soul to come along.

I'm sure that Bartimaeus could sense that something of tremendous significance was happening on the road. "Jesus! He is coming! Why, I've heard people say that this Jesus had made crippled people walk and blind people see!" Blind people!

"JESUS — HAVE MERCY ON ME!"

Some reaction that cry for help! Somebody spoke to him, "Bartimaeus, for goodness sake, keep quiet — Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem — He has a lot on his mind! Shh!"

"But he thought to himself — ("This may be my only chance! Maybe Jesus would have a moment that He could spend with me. I'll try again!")

"Jesus, have mercy on me!"

And Jesus stopped. Jesus actually paused — and called Bartimaeus to Him — the Son of the most high — God — stopped, for a dirty blind, miserable of-no-consequence beggar! The Great one stopped for a no-consequence beggar! The Great one stopped for a nobody! And you know the rest.

Bartimaeus, a nobody, became a somebody — because He cared. He could now rejoin the human race, so to speak; he could now do something and be respectable.

And this is what our Lord does for the nobodies of the world — He helps them to be able to say

"I'm Someone!"

Listen — "the very hairs of your head are numbered."

"the good shepherd knows His sheep — by name!"

Galatians 4:24 says:

"But when the term was complete, God sent His own Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to purchase freedom for the subjects of the law —"

In order that we might attain the status of sons, and to prove that you *are* sons, God has sent into our hearts the spirit of the Son crying Father!

You are not longer a slave — but a SON —
You are a son and daughter of God!
You, are a real someone!

Shouldn't the Churches come in here? Shouldn't it be, that each member

of each congregation feels himself to be somebody, not necessarily mind you, someone important, but someone. And how can this happen unless we experience "fellowship" — knowing one another, open with one another, helping one another, and in a real way leaning on one another. I once heard an outstanding Canadian say at an A.A. Round Up, "My fellow alcoholics — I need you!" Oh that we could say that, and mean it in our congregations today, "My brothers — I need you!" and then our little nobodies would feel that they were really somebody!

1. Jesus had a great deal on His mind, but in spite of that He had time for Bartimaeus. Our Lord was entering the latter throes of His passion. The garden, the trial, the rejection, the cross — all were standing waiting for Him. But He still had time for Bartimaeus. And sometimes, we think *we* are busy, we have much on our minds, and we don't hear the cry for help.
2. Bartimaeus was crying out for help. He did it the only way he knew how. Little children do it differently. Sometimes they act up. The young person cries out for notice — in his dress, or in his sit-ins or in his protest marches. Isn't the American Negro saying today "I'm someone! Notice me — please." And what about our Canadian Indian?
3. Those who were marching along with Jesus tried to keep Bartimaeus quiet. They thought that he was interrupting something important. Isn't this happening today? We want to keep anybody quiet that threatens the *status quo* or who is showing tendencies of rocking the boat.
4. Do you catch the tremendous significance of those two words, "Jesus stopped." One man has said that this is the heart of the Gospel. Here is God, in action — stopping for a man in need. God had time for a miserable, good-only-for-begging dirty man! And then we have the absolute nerve to say so often, "Sorry, I haven't time!" But God had time!

And so, because Jesus stopped, Bartimaeus knew that he could at last count for something. He could say, without whistling in the dark, "I'm someone."

In Matthew 25 there is that well known passage about the naked and the sick and people in prison. Isn't this one way the Church can help nobodies feel that they are somebody — as one human being relates to another.

How many Linuses are there around? "Do you hear me?" he said, "Do you hear me?"

"I'm someone!"

The truth of the matter is that God does hear you. He does indeed! And if the Church is looking for something to do today in our de-humanized world, it should be looking for people who are crying out, and it should be hearing this plea and it should be prepared to try and do something about it.

VII

THE BUSH THAT BURNED

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Text: "He looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. Exodus 3:2

BESIDE a bush which flamed in the desert and was not consumed Moses had an encounter with God. It was an encounter which had great consequences for himself and for his people. From the midst of the bush which burned with fire and was not consumed God spoke to Moses of His redemptive purpose for His people, and summoned Moses to play a significant part in the fulfilment of that purpose.

Explanations, or attempted explanations, of the miracle of the bush which burned with fire and was not consumed have not been very impressive. We come closer to the heart of the whole incident if we take the viewpoint of the poet that earth is crammed with heaven, and that if we have eyes to see, every common bush may be aflame with God. Whittier could see something of the splendour of the glory of God's majesty in the autumnal splendour of the maples:

> And when the miracle of autumn came,
> And all the woods, with many-coloured flame
> Burned, unconsumed, a voice without a sound
> Spoke to him from each kindled bush around
> And made the strange new landscape hallowed ground.

The bush which flamed in the desert and was not consumed has been cherished as a symbol of God's presence with His people, of the perpetual possibility of an encounter between God and man, and of the indestructible,

redemptive purpose He cherishes for His people.

I

In our branch of the Reformed Church the symbol of the burning bush, with the motto, *Nec Tamen Consumebatur,* has been widely used. All branches of the Presbyterian family of churches which united in 1875 to form the Presbyterian Church in Canada made use of it. It has been embroidered on pulpit falls; it has been depicted in stained glass; it has been painted on walls, and carved in wood and stone on buildings dedicated to the worship of God. It has appeared on the title pages of periodicals, and on the official minutes of church courts.

Strangely enough it does not appear to have been formally or officially adopted as a symbol of the church. It appeared on the seal of the National Synod of the Reformed Church in France in the sixteenth century. George Mossman, an Edinburgh printer, who was commissioned to print the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, put the symbol on the title page around the year 1690. From that time onwards the symbol has been used widely, although quite unofficially, as an eloquent and appropriate symbol of the Church of God.

It is of the essence of a symbol that its meaning cannot be fully defined in words. It is to the language of symbolism we have recourse when we come to the deep places of life where words fail us. A symbol is a blank cheque which we fill in from our own resources of knowledge and experience. It is an outline which we fill in from our own memories and insights. We can go a little distance, at least towards seeing something of the attraction which this symbol of the burning bush has had for succeeding generations in the church, by looking at it in its historic setting in the story of God's dealings with His people.

II

When Moses had his encounter with God beside the bush which flamed in the desert and was not consumed, his people were in bondage. He had already tried the way of violence in an attempt to help them. He had slain an Egyptian and had been compelled to flee to the desert. Here, as he nursed his hurts and his hopes, God spoke to him from the bush which burned and was not consumed.

From his encounter with God at the burning bush Moses was assured of God's concern for His people. He heard God say: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard

their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them." Moses was not, after all, alone in his concern for the plight of his countrymen. When they writhed under the lashes of the taskmasters God knew about it. When they toiled without hope, God knew about it. When they suffered the indignities of slavery, God knew about it. He not only knew about it: He was concerned about it.

One of the precious elements in our Christian Gospel is its assurance of God's concern for His people. There is a sense in which the Gospel of the Incarnation itself is an extension of this word which Moses heard beside the flaming bush in the wilderness: "I have seen the affliction of my people . . . I have heard their cry . . . I know their sorrows . . . And I am come down to deliver them." That the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, that God became man for us men and for our salvation, was the supreme manifestation of the love, and care, and concern of God for His people. It was of this love, and care, and concern of God for His people that Moses was assured as he stood in awe and wonder beside the bush which burned and was not consumed.

The symbol of the burning bush speaks to us, too, of the miraculous continuity of God's redemptive purpose for His people. From the midst of the flaming bush God declared Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The patriarchs had gone the way of all flesh, and had long ago been gathered to their fathers, but the work of God continued. The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was concerned about their descendants in bondage in Egypt, and was working out a means of deliverance for them.

Generation after generation rises and passes away. Old orders change and give place to new. But's God's redemptive work for His people continues, and He fulfills Himself in many ways. The outward forms of the church change. They change, as the patterns of flame on a burning bush change from moment to moment. As in that changing pattern of flame the fire is still there, the divine life of the church and of the people of God survives and continues.

The persistence of the life and witness of the church as the people of God is something of a miracle in itself — a miracle comparable to that of the bush flaming in the desert. Corinth was a city of evil repute in the ancient world, but there is a letter in our New Testament which begins, "To the church of God which is at Corinth." In the midst of the iniquities of Corinth there was a church of God. It was small, struggling church, it is true, racked with divisions and beset with many problems, but

still the church of God. It is something of a miracle that there should be in our New Testament references to the saints in Caesar's household. That is not the sort of people you would expect to find in Caesar's household, but there they were, as unexpectedly and as much out of place as a flaming bush in the desert.

One of the psalmists speaks of God making grass to grow upon the mountains. He was thinking doubtless of little patches of green and growing things which exist on sun-beaten, wind-swept crags where one would not expect anything to grow. In the eyes of the psalmist it was one of the evidences of God's greatness and glory that He made grass to grow upon the mountains. God, who numbered the stars, and bound up the broken-hearted and heard the young ravens when they cried, is always bringing unlikely things to pass. He makes grass to grow upon the mountains. He raises up saints in Caesar's household. He raises up a church of God in Corinth. He works out His purposes of good in spite of the frailties and imperfections of His servants. He continues the witness of His church through all the changing scenes of history. It has stood in our world, and continues to stand, as a bush which burns and is not consumed.

III

From the midst of the bush which flamed in the desert and was not consumed Moses heard a summons to involve himself in God's redemptive work for His people. "Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people." In his encounter with God he became aware of duty, as the stern daughter of the voice of God, summoning him to an unwelcome task, and laying upon him an obligation which he accepted reluctantly. "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?" Isn't that what we are always inclined to say when God lays the obligation of some new duty upon us? Why me? Who am I that I should have to do this? It is only in the awareness of God's presence and in confidence in His promises of strength and encouragement that we attempt the impossible things which the people of God have always been attempting to do in our world.

The God we serve and worship is the God who sees the afflictions of His people, who hears their cry, and is come down to deliver them. He is the God who sees the plight of the exploited in our world. He sees the squalor of the city's slum, and hears the cry of neglected children. He sees the plight of the illiterate. He sees the homelessness of the refugee. He hears the cry of the suffering. He knows of the misery of men who

are homesick in their homes and heartsick from attempting to live without God. He knows the fears, the anxieties and frustrations of men, and He knows their inability to achieve deliverance for themselves.

We who worship God in a church which cherishes as its symbol a bush which burns and is not consumed have laid upon our consciences the obligation to serve Him in our generation with all our gifts of heart, and mind, and strength. We are obligated to involve ourselves in His ongoing redemptive purpose for His people and for His world.

VIII

WALKING IN THE LIGHT

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Text: And God said, "let there be light and there was light". Genesis 1:3

THE children of God walk in the light. We walk in the light which falls on us from behind, and we walk towards a light which burns and shines before us. The man in Christ is a child of the light. He knows where he has come from, he can look back over the road behind, and he knows, in general at least, where he is going. Not only does the light from behind him illumine the path ahead, but he has a great light before him towards which he journeys, at times quickly, and at times stumbling along with great difficulty. The light is there, he knows that it is there, and even though at times the light seems to grow dim, or his eyes are blinded that he cannot see it, still it always reappears to guide him forward.

There is a sense in which all light on our forward path comes to us from behind. At any point in history, a man is like someone who has opened the door of his house and stands there with the light streaming out past him into the darkness. In this light he can see at least a little way. The experience of the past has surely something to tell us of the future.

I

Let us consider first then the light which comes from behind us.

First, and most important of all, there is our religious faith. This comes to us from the past. Christianity is a historical religion; by this we mean that once in time God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. That once in time God was in Christ in order that He might reconcile the

world to Himself. Just as once in time Columbus landed on the new world and a new era in history began, just as once in time General Lee sent word to Ulysses S. Grant that he would like to meet him at the old Court House at Appotomax, and the Civil War between the States was over, just as once in time Watt invented the steam engine and the industrial revolution was on its way, so once in time God came Himself into our world so that His children might no longer walk in darkness.

Now just at this point we divide the men from the boys. In what way, we are asked, was God in Christ? Do you mean to tell us that the great God, the creator of the Heavens and the earth, once veiled His glory in human flesh? Do you mean to tell us that the child of Mary was God Himself. We reply, "yes", that is exactly what we do mean. Christianity is a revealed religion, revealed to us by God Himself. When we stand in our pulpits crying, "thus saith the Lord" that is what we mean. We men can take Christianty, or we can leave it alone, we can believe or disbelieve, But this we cannot do, we cannot water Christianity down to suit our convenience. The light which shines from behind us is the light of God Himself. When Jesus cried in the market place, "God is love", it was God who was speaking, when Jesus said to the dying thief, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise", it was God who was speaking, when he said, "behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man will open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him", it was God who was speaking, speaking to our lonely hearts.

In the midst of the uncertainty of our times, when so few things seem secure, so few things certain, surely we Christians should give thanks for this the greatest certainty of all. That God is, and, that in His own way, He is the rewarder of them that seek Him. 20th century man is confused and bewildered. Too many things have happened too fast, and he has yet to adjust his thinking to the altered facts of the modern world. For centuries he lived, if not well, at least in a familiar pattern; the farmer knew where he stood in the scheme of things, the merchant, the landlord, the minister, all had their place in a secure order. Little change took place from age to age. Then came the invention of printing, then the discovery of the New World, then the age of reason, then scientific humanism, and now we are in the age of automation and the atomic bomb. The pace also of change has vastly accelerated in the last fifty years. The world of today has little resemblance in any way to that which our fathers knew. But God has not changed. The light from the past shines steadily and, if we will, we can walk in that light.

As we think on these things, the lovely words of the 103rd Psalm fall like music on our souls. "As for man his days are as grass, as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and his righteousness unto children's children. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. Bless the Lord all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works in all places of his dominion; bless the Lord, O my soul".

As we remember how God has given us the light of the world in Himself as he came in Jesus Christ, we remember also how that light has been kept burning for men's guidance through all the years.

Having given us the light, at no time has God allowed the light to go out. We think of the first disciples, of Andrew and Peter, of Paul and Apollos, of Barnabas, and Thomas whose doubts so tormented him in the beginning, but who travelled far over the lands and oceans to establish the church in Southern India; we think of Augustine, and Francis of Assisi, we think of Luther and Calvin, of Beza and Knox, we think of Charles Wesley. In our own time we think of Barth, the great Swiss theologian, of Brunner with his tender understanding, of Bonhoeffer martyred by the Nazis. As we think of these men we think of the Church, for these men and hundreds of thousands like them have kept the Church alive. We think of faithful ministers of the Word and Sacraments, of patient Church School teachers, of devoted women gathering their children Sunday by Sunday so that they too might learn of Christ. We think of choir members labouring over their anthems in a thousand, thousand practices throughout the Christian world so that the service on Sunday might be a more lovely thing. We think of great cathedrals and tiny little churches where the servants of the light have kept it burning through the years. We think of the Church. Those of us who have loved and served the Church all our lives know its weaknesses better than any cynical outsider can ever know, but we know its strength as well. Never in your most despairing moments sell the Church short. With all its failings, it has been the keeper of the light, the mother of souls for almost two thousand years.

II

So from the past the light shines, God and the Church. As man stands at the door of his house looking outwards this light from behind

is a warming, a cheering thing, but what of the future? There is a light ahead as well as a light behind.

Now we could wander astray very easily. We could speak of the lights which lead men on, of our search for peace, for human brotherhood, for that gleaming far off country which men call the Kingdom of God, but let us keep closer to the earth, let us speak of the light which leads us on as Christian individuals, let us speak of things which are easily within the grasp of any one of us. The light which shines before us leads us first to maturity in Christ, and at the last to our eternal rest.

What do you mean by maturity in Christ? Paul speaks of this in Ephesians when he calls upon these, his spiritual children, to be worthy of the "vocation wherewith they are called until they all come in the unity of the faith, and of knowledge of the son of God, unto a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." And in Galations he speaks of the fruits of the Spirit which are "love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance". This is the light which shines before us, the possibility, the assurance, that if we walk in the light, we will cease to be creatures of the darkness, and become in some dim and distant way like to Him who was the light of the world.

Our first task then lies to our hands, and it is to make of ourselves the best we can make. Alone we can do nothing. Man's primary instincts, the psychologists tell us, are hunger and fear. In this we are like the very beasts that perish: but we do not need to live and die like animals, happy when we are fed, miserable when we are hungry; in the light of the Gospel we can see before us possibilities for ourselves. Paul speaks again and again of, "the man in Christ". In his deathless conception a man in Christ was a man indeed. To be raised above this corruptible body which is so closely allied to the perishing things about us, and to wear upon one's soul the stamp and the insignia of the eternal, this is to be a man in Christ.

Years ago, during the Second World War, I wore with pride the red patch of the First Canadian Division, later the blue patch of the Second, and finally the maroon patch of the Fifth, which carried with it the honour of being part of the British Eighth Army, which under Lord Alexander became one of the finest fighting units in the armies of the West. I was proud to wear these little bits of colour. I keep them still and every now and then I look at them to remind myself that once I was with those who fought and died for freedom. I prize these little things, I treasure their associations, but above them all I prize the white collar

which I wear. For while the bright, brave guerdon on my shoulders once told all men that I was a Canadian of the First, or the Second, or the Fifth Division, one of Alexander's veterans of the Eighth Army, the white collar tells to all men that I wear the yoke of Christ. That I am one of countless thousands throughout the world who seek the way, the way to the fullness of the stature of the man in Christ.

This is part of the light that shines before us, the challenge and the promise. "take my yoke upon you and learn of me", said Jesus, "for my yoke is easy and my burden is light". That we will ever achieve to the full stature of manhood in Christ is beyond us, and we know that it is beyond us, but we are those who seek the way of righteousness. We have an aim, an objective, and beside the achievement of manhood in Christ, all other achievements become as nothing.

Yet another light shines before us and it gleams and shines in welcome. We are conscious, all of us, often bitterly conscious of the fact of failing powers. Life goes on, and with it each day we die a little. Loved ones who once walked with us become memories, friends leave us silently, one by one. We are ever more aware that our own days are numbered, and that soon we will cease to be. "Ask not", says Donne, "for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee". The fact of death is ever with us and we fear death. A. E. Housman, speaking of the dead in the First World War, has these poignant lines,

"Here dead we lie because we did not choose to live and spurn the land
from which we sprung.
Life to be sure is nothing much to lose but young men think it is and we
were young."

The fear of death is part of our mortality, the mortal man naturally fears to die. But we are not mortal. The man in Christ has no fear of death, for death has no power over him. Thus saith the Lord, "I am the Resurrection and the Life, who so liveth and believeth in me, shall not perish but shall have everlasting life, for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved".

The light shines behind us in the Incarnation of Christ. It shines also before us from the lighted windows of God's House of many mansions. "Let not your hearts be troubled", saith the Lord, "ye believe in God, believe also in me".

So we go onwards walking in the light and walking towards the light, and when at the last with sin stained hands we knock at the

doorways of God's mercy, the doors will open and the light will shine out upon us. What awaits us we do not know, but we are content to rest our confidence in the promise of the Scriptures, "that ear hath not heard, nor eye seen, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to understand, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him".

IX

THE SPRINGS OF GRATITUDE

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Text: *"I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much." — Luke 7:47 — R.S.V.*

"Therefore I say to you that God must have forgiven her sins, many as they are, since she displays such deep thankfulness."—(Joachim Jeremias)

AMONG our modern catchwords none suffers more than the word "charity". Charity denotes a condescending act. It has come to mean giving a mere pittance to rid oneself of the annoyance of the beggar. We have a very debased word in place of that which in the Bible is synonymous with love.

In the story Luke records the woman who was a sinner performs an act of charity. The questions which we want to ask are: What is its source? Is charity simply bred into men? How then does one account for malice and illwill, hatred and resentment? Or, is charity an attitude gained by educating persons to its value? Anyone who has taken part in a Red Feather campaign or Federated Charities or United Appeal knows this may be part of the answer, but not all. Until one really comes to grips with himself, with his own soul, we cannot move him one iota from niggardliness and indifference or hostility, to goodwill and generosity.

The first thought one has in coming to grips with himself is a lack of fulfilment, a deep felt need, or a sense of sin. Think of the incident of the Pharisee and the sinful woman in the light of Jesus' parable of the two debtors. His question was, "Which of them will love him more?" Later he points out, "He who is forgiven little, loves little."

The woman came conscious of her sins, which were many, conscious of her need of forgiveness. The Pharisee knew no humility. In loveless virtue he closed his eyes and remarked, "If this man were a prophet, he should have known what sort of woman this is who is touching him". He had no sense of need. Jesus was only an itinerant preacher that he had brought home to dinner after synagogue. He saw the needs of the woman but not his own deep need. Loveless virtue, stern moral rectitude—familiar to each one of us, found in each one of us—the veneer of our repectability; until we peel it away, until we get beneath the surface we do not really know ourselves.

It is a deep felt sense of need, a conscious sense of sin or the possibility of sinning that has been the wellspring of gratitude in the lives of the saints through the ages. With the song-writer they proclaim:

"O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be."

One of the anecdotes told of many a preacher, but perhaps original with John Bradford, an English preacher and martyr of the sixteenth century illustrates this. Preaching outdoors he saw a condemned man on his way to the gallows. Bradford stopped, and looked, then remarked, "There but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford".

In Edinburgh a well-known and highly respected citizen was arrested and sent to prison for embezzlement. The assistant of Dr. Alexander Whyte, a saintly and well-loved minister in that city, tells that the following Sunday in his vestry Dr. Whyte heard the bells ringing and turning said, "Do you hear those Sabbath bells? He hears them in his prison cell this morning. Man it might have been me".

Each of the saints has known that deep within lies darkness and treachery, which only the grace of God touching their lives has enabled them to overcome. It is his strength that has overcome sin and temptation and allowed each of them to live at the level of his highest possibilities.

"O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be."

Similarly each of the saints has known that his material possessions are not due to his labors alone. God's providence, God's sustenance is behind the bounty of his life. How dependent we are upon God for all things, even the very breath of life. This is the first spring of gratitude, a strong sense of dependence upon the grace of God, a sense of sin and need.

The second spring of gratitude lies in the assurance of forgiveness, the fulfillment of the soul's need. Behind the sinful woman's act of love or

charity lies a sense of wholeness or healing. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." The woman came to Jesus conscious of her sins, never doubting Jesus' ability to forgive. Well she might have sung:

"O Saviour I have nought to plead
In earth beneath or heaven above
But just my own exceeding need,
And thy exceeding love."

This woman finds in him one who can forgive her sins and supply her need.

What a contrast with the Pharisee. Simon is bitterly disappointed. "If this man were a prophet, he should have known what sort of woman this is who is touching him." He invited a celebrity home to dinner and instead found his own love of virtue greater than that of the preacher. He stood back and asked, "How can anyone pure and noble allow someone like her to touch him. Hands off, go away. It may be infectious."

Norman Cousins tells how easily this attitude comes to a person and then illustrates how the cry of a common humanity may break it down. Visiting the leprosy hospital at Lambarene he had been warned of the precautions to take when mingling with the patients and the fears of many of the visitors which had kept them at a distance were conveyed to him. Cousins knew the chances the nurses and staff take daily mingling with the lepers. Speaking to a leper couple holding a young lad of eighteen months with mucous streaming from nose and mouth he was compelled by the friendliness and the grasping hand of the youngster to pick him up and play with him in spite of the fact that many hold that the mucous of runny noses is the carrier of infection. His common humanity would not allow a hands off attitude.

Throughout Jesus' ministry we see him breaking down the barriers that virtue and respectability would set up, setting aside the obstacles that prevented contact with the sinful and needy. Jesus saw what the woman might have been, what she might still be, and knew that love could ennoble her life. He allowed her to touch him. He spoke words of comfort and understanding to her. He brought healing and forgiveness.

How far from the scornful, wondering cry of the guests, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" How far from Simon's cry, "If this man were a prophet . . ." The very embodiment of God's love shone forth that day. Common humanity reached across every barrier. The grace of God touched the life of a sinful woman and brought healing.

That love remains faithful today. Needy souls may yet find a response, may yet find healing and forgiveness. Acknowledgement of our needs will

find him waiting still.

"Ask and it will be given you,
Seek and you will find,
Knock and it will be opened to you."

A strong sense of need, of dependence upon God's grace, and the assurance of healing and forgiveness, these are the wellsprings of gratitude.

All is not said if we were to stop here. Love, gratitude, generosity, charity arise from the knowledge that we have deep needs, and that these needs have been met. They arise from the knowledge that God meets us on the level of our sins and raises us above them. Love and gratitude seek ways of making themselves known. "Therefore I say to you that God must have forgiven her sins, many as they are, since she displays such deep thankfulness." The woman's gratitude led her to perform her act of charity for Jesus. It took the place of the customary courtesies which the Pharisee omitted.

Albert Schweitzer, in his book *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest,* coined a phrase—"the fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain". He writes, "Those who have learnt by experience what physical pain and bodily anguish means, belong together all the world over: they are united by a secret bond. One and all they know the horrors of suffering to which man can be exposed, and one and all they know the longing to be free from pain. He who has been delivered from pain must not think that he is now free again and at liberty to take up life just as it was before, entirely forgetful of the past. He is now 'a man whose eyes are open' with regard to pain and anguish, and he must help to overcome those two enemies (as far as human power can control them) and to bring to others the deliverance which he has himself enjoyed." And then Schweitzer strikes home, "Their gratitude should be the source of the gifts needed."[5]

There are the elements of gratitude—a sense of need, the attainment of healing, and the resulting attempt to overcome pain and anguish throughout the world.

Norman Cousins, who acknowledges his debt to Schweitzer's writings, speaks of the same feeling of obligation. He had tuberculosis as a youngster. He knew the pang of loneliness, the animosities of human beings confined to an institution, the unconcern of the unaffected. Owing his *joie de vivre* to baseball he writes, "Even after I was able to accept fully the fact that I could live a normal life, I carried with me the feeling that I had the obligation somehow to pay back. The sense of debt was much

[5]A. Schweitzer, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest, Collins,* 1960.

more than an intellectual one. It lay deep in my bones and I had no way of ignoring it. Indeed, from the moment that I walked out of the sanatorium and looked back at my Sunday perch on the old wall near the entrance, I knew that my life would be unbearable unless I could find some way of making good the debt I couldn't quite define but that I knew would be with me as long as I lived."[6]

"The fellowship of those who bear the mark of pain." We belong to such a brotherhood—the fellowship of those who bear the mark of sin. We have known healing and forgiveness. Our gratitude should manifest itself in lives of service, in gifts of love. Alexander MacLaren, the great English Baptist preacher knew this chain of gratitude, "The sense of sin precedes forgiveness; forgiveness precedes love; love precedes all acceptable and faithful service." How it should move us all to sing:

"When we stand with Christ in glory
Looking o'er life's finished story
Then Lord, shall I fully know,
Not till then, how much I owe.
"Chosen not for good in me,
Wakened up from wrath to flee,
Hidden in the Saviour's side,
By the Spirit sanctified,
Teach me, Lord, on earth to show,
By my love, how much I owe."

If there is anyone who feels deep within the need of God's grace, let him come, for God will receive you. If there is anyone who has experienced the cleansing love and renewing fellowship of Jesus Christ, let him come to sing his praise and utter his love. If there is anyone who longs to show his gratitude and his love, let him come and find ways of service to Christ the King, by inviting others to meet with him, by giving his loyalty and support to efforts to extend the knowledge of God's kingdom throughout the world.

[6]N. Cousins, *Dr. Schweitzer of Lambarene,* Harper, 1960.

X

"TREASURE OF THE HEART"

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Text: *"Where your heart is, there your treasure will be also."*
Matthew 6:21

JESUS is here reminding us of a basic fact of our creation, namely that we are becoming what we love. It's a terrible fact, if our love is misdirected.

First of all two notes to help us understand exactly what He is saying.

1) "Heart" means the inmost self, the centre of being, the essence of the personality. "Heart" is you as God sees you. It may not be what you think you are, nor what other people think you are. (We are told in the parable of the judgment that God's estimate of us will bring some surprises.) Later Jesus uses the word "life" and also the word "body" to denote the same idea as "heart"—the very self.

2) "Treasure" is not restricted to money or material wealth. "Treasure" is whatever is treasured. Treasure which is transitory is being contrasted with treasure which endures.

Now let us set down the teaching in propositions:

1) The heart is where the treasure is. It is the heart's attitude which makes the treasure a treasure.

2) The heart will have the same destiny as the treasure. If the treasure is such that it will corrode, or become moth-eaten, or if it can be somehow stolen, then the heart will become rusty or ragged or empty. (We have heard of people who after an upsetting experience say that they nothing left to live for. They may be telling the truth!)

3) Therefore, let your treasure be what is rust-proof, moth-proof and burglar-proof for your heart's sake. So the question arises: What is the treasure which makes the heart healthy?

This question is being answered in the passage that follows, where Jesus warns against undue worry about things that are being provided constantly and adequately for us in God's providence, such as food, clothing, housing. To focus on these things is to make them our treasure. But the life (heart) is more than eating. The body (heart) is more than clothing. Then He gives the answer in precise words: "Seek ye first (set your heart on) the kingdom (rulership) of God and His righteousness". The treasure of the heart is to believe in God's ruling, and his providential care of the world. This was the secret of Jesus' life of communion with the Father. If we can understand what Jesus is saying, we have a timely message for our sensate age.

(1) From many directions there are forces bullying us into sensualism. "Gracious living", we are being told, is having the right clothes, food, and house furnishing. It's having the right street address, with the right car, and being in with the right people. We need the word that teaches us to be skeptical of these demonic urgings to set our hearts on the things that please our senses. "Gracious living" has very little to do with our physical needs, (which our heavenly Father knows about anyway and has lavishly provided for). It has rather to do with our generosity and sympathy and forbearance, that is to say with our sensitivity to the needs of the people around us. The sensual person becomes progressively insensitive to other people. We become what we love. The person who loves his sensations becomes a sensualist.

(2) In our time we see also a kind of negative sensualism. It's a new form of an often-repeated attempt to escape from the thraldom of things by despising them. But to despise what God has made is to be under their dominion, as much by treasuring them. Reverse-sensualism shrivels the heart as much as sensualism, because it is dominated by things. We become what we love, and "if it be things that destroy us, what matter whether it be things we have, or things we have not." (Macdonald)

(3) The heart's need is not freedom *from* care but freedom *in* care. In the book *"The Blue Field"* the author has one of his characters, whose house was destroyed by a bomb, say "When a man has lost everything, it's surprising to discover how little he really needs". The heart is not destroyed by misfortune nor is it preserved by affluence. In fact

"heart failure" is a greater danger to the person who has abundance. He is more strongly tempted to imagine that his treasure is in the abundance, rather than in the One who gave the abundance. He is in greater danger of treasuring the transitory. On the other hand however, the sin of covetousness is not limited to the rich. Poverty is no guarantee of faith. The poor man has to seek God's rule as well as the rich.

(4) In these days when material wealth has increased beyond what any age has previously known, there is a strong attraction for us to believe that life consists in the mere abundance of things. There is also a strong current of religious doubt sweeping over our culture. Perhaps there is relationship. We must learn, and help others to learn, that our real wealth — well being — is discovery of God's rule in our world. The gifts He has provided are for development and use according to His will. We are not the owners but rather the managers (stewards) of the world's wealth. Our management must be diligent and responsible for the sake of the Giver, not for the sake of the gifts. Our stewardship is our witness to our faith. Unless our hearts are pointed beyond the gifts to the Giver, they will perish as the gifts disappear or are taken away, for it will be with the heart as with the treasure. "Therefore lay not up treasures for yourselves on earth — but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal".

XI

LET THE DOORS OPEN OUTWARD

Rev. James S. S. Armour, B.A., B.D., S.T.M.
St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, Newfoundland

Text: "Then came Jesus, the doors being shut . . ." St. John 20:62

IT is the law of the land that all church doors open outwards. This, of course, is a wise precaution against fire. But on this Pentecost Sunday, I would have you see this as a symbol of the essential nature of the Church. A church, if it is to be the Church of Jesus Christ, must have doors that open outwards.

We read in St. John's Gospel that, after the cruel shock of the Crucifixion, the disciples shut themselves in. They were frightened men. Those who had put Jesus to death would be even now hunting down His followers in order to stamp out the movement once for all. They were bewildered men. The shepherd was gone and the sheep had scattered. They were disillusioned men. The Cross meant the end of the Gospel—all that was left was a memory—a memory of a glorious but lost cause. The doors were shut—fast.

But "then came Jesus" and everything was different. Once the disciples realized that He had triumphed over death and the grave and was alive for evermore—fear gave way to faith, sadness to unspeakable joy, doubt and despair to glorious assurance. From that moment on, the doors were open—wide to the whole world.

Church doors must open outwards. A church with doors that are shut, or, at best, open inwards, is no church at all. And yet the sad fact is that there are today many churches with shut doors.

One thinks, at once, of the colour bar. But is it only in South Africa

and Dixie that 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week? Oh, here in Canada, race prejudice is not so blatant, but it is no less real. How many clubs and residential areas are closed to Jews and those of other races? There are churches in our land where Negroes, Chinese and others are not really welcome . . . "they would be happier among their own people" the children of the white God smugly say. It is not too many years ago that a Presbyterian elder voiced the opinion at a session meeting that the young people might not be safe with an African assistant minister! There are thousands of Christians who believe that somehow the Church is "for whites only". The arrogance and ignorance of it all! He who came to earth as a Jew, whose Cross was carried by an African, and who was condemned and nailed to a Cross by Europeans—He is the Saviour of the *world*—and nothing less will do.

But the church of the shut door is more common than that. There is such a thing as economic segregation. The poor we have with us always, but please not in the same pew! Church membership, you see, has become a sort of status symbol in our affluent society. The public is re-assured to read that business tycoons, office seekers and social leaders are staunch church members. It creates confidence; it suggests honesty and respectability . . . Of course, it is well to belong to the right denomination and the right congregation. To be a Presbyterian, we are told, is socially quite acceptable. I read recently the following remarkable bit of advice to a young couple moving to a strange town . . . "Join yourselves to the local church; there you will meet the right sort of people and your husband will make valuable contacts for his business". How strange that is. One of the criticisms of our Lord was that He associated with the wrong sort of people. He numbered among His friends publicans and sinners, lepers and even a prostitute.

How many churches in our land have shut doors. There is the church in the multi-racial community with the invisible sign "Anglo-Saxons only". There is the wealthy congregation in the slum heart of the city, with no heart for the misery at its doors. There is the Ivory Tower Presbyterian Church, so heavenly minded that it is no earthly use in solving the social, economic, industrial, political problems of its day and generation. The Church whose doors are shut against new ideas, new forms of worship, new approaches to evangelism—who, despising the sons, glory in the faith of our fathers—proud that they haven't entertained a new thought since 1875!! The Church of the Shut Door—what a perversion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But, there is another kind of church, which must share this condemnation. That is the Church whose doors open only inwards. The church without a mission—the church of the black side of the envelope. They are unashamedly interested only in themselves. The church exists for the congregation. They are perfectly willing to give of their time, talent and treasure—but only for their own church. Here there is no concern for weaker congregations; no concern for extending the Church to the new communities of our land; no concern for missionary outreach in the far corners of the world; no concern for the refugee, the widow and the orphan. No, they are only concerned with themselves. THE Church becomes OUR Church—and all the doors open inwards.

Of course, such a church ceases to be a Church. It becomes a society of the like-minded; a spiritual clique; an exclusive religious club. For unless the doors open outwards, what does it matter that within the congregation is comfortably seated, its choir gowned in the latest shade of blue, its minister able and learned. It is no church . . . for, as a famous missionary once startled a fashionable congregation by saying, "a church without a mission isn't worth a damn".

But why harp on it, you say. We know—we always put a dime in the red side of the envelope—we get the point. Yes, but do we? It is all too easy for a congregation to see their mission only in terms of themselves. The Church exists—for them. The doors are open—for them to worship God in the way that suits them (and presumably God). An organist and choir, a well-heated and dimly-lit sanctuary with comfortable pews, are necessary for their uplift and ease. A Sunday School should be provided—for their children; week-day activities—for their young people; suitable clubs and social functions—for their pleasure. A minister (preferably a Ph.D.) is hired to preach to them, to visit them when sick or convenient; to baptize their babies; marry their children; bury their dead. He is *their* minister. In short, the flock desire (and often get) not a shepherd but a pet lamb!

That's not fair, you say, Our church wants new members. We are always trying to attract people to our church. But why? It is because the financial burden is too great for so few? Is it because a full church gratifies the ego of minister and congregation alike? Is it because a big church will have more influence and prestige in the community? Or, it is because we are genuinely concerned with the spread of the Gospel and the extension of the Kingdom of God?

There is an ancient question asked of a minister at his ordination or

induction. It is the all important question of the service: "Are zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and a desire for the salvation of men, as far as you know your own heart, your great motives and chief inducements to enter the office of the ministry?"

It is a question that might well be put to every congregation in our land. What are your great motives and chief inducements as a Church of Jesus Christ? Have you a mission to anybody but yourselves? Are you interested in reaching out into the community for new members, not for what you can get out of them, but for what you can give them? Have you at the very heart of your existence the will to serve suffering humanity with no thought of return or reward? Is your great motive, your chief inducement as a Church, the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by preaching and by example to all men, of every language and colour and nation? Do the doors of this Church open outwards?

This is Whitsunday—the Day of Pentecost—when we celebrate the birthday of the Church—the coming of the Holy Spirit in power. His coming, with the Gospel of the risen and victorious Christ, burst wide the doors. The disciples in that vital, challenging experience could not stay behind closed doors. They went everywhere, we read, preaching the Gospel.

If our Church is to be a Church of Jesus Christ, a Church in apostolic succession to the Church of Pentecost, our doors must never shut, never open only inwards. They must open outwards to the world; we must fling wide the gates and proclaim with St. Peter:

> "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off, every one whom the Lord our God shall call to Him". (RSV)

XII

AN ADULTEROUS GENERATION

Rev. Sheldon Mackenzie, M.A., Ph.D.
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Montreal, P.Q.

Text: "You shall not commit adultery". Exodus 20:14

ABOUT two years ago there was a young lady in London who had many friends in high places. Her friendship with some of them proved to be disastrous. One man lost his position and another man his life. But these men were not the only contacts she had. There were other uneasy people in London for some months during and after the political scandal.

Giles, the cartoonist for the *Daily Express,* depicted the nervousness of these uneasy men in a sketch of a party in progress. The party was a grand affair and everyone in attendance wore formal dress. Bejewelled ladies in floor length gowns stood beside bemedalled men in their smart evening attire. The party was taking place in a large drawing room where the windows were heavily draped and the French doors of which opened on to a moonlit garden. A man in livery stood at the arched doorway to the room and announced each guest as he or she arrived. "Ladies and Gentlemen", he said, "Miss Christine . . ." but before he could finish his introduction every man in the room had disappeared. Those who couldn't make it to the garden hid behind the heavy drapes, and when the rush was over the little man at the door finished his introduction and said simply ". . . Chisholm".

It is interesting to note why the unfortunate incident involving political figures and this young woman came to public attention. It was feared that Miss Keiller was sharing secrets of national importance

presumably while talking in her sleep, and not that there was anything particularly immoral about her sleeping habits. However, the seventh commandment is concerned about her sort of behaviour because it is concerned with marriage and adultery. It provides the background for the Christian view of marriage and married life.

MARRIAGE

In the days before the time of the Commandments a man might kill another in a dispute over the right to claim a particular mate. The young woman or girl in question was merely a spectator to such an affair — her consent was not required nor requested. The stronger man of the two would eventually defeat the other and the woman dragged or carried off to the cave or hut that then became her new home. Once she was taken home she became the property of her husband. If necessary he could sell her or trade her for another wife or for cattle. The point is that she belonged to him, and as part of his property she had no rights and many responsibilities.

She raised his children and fed and clothed them and her husband. In some civilizations she had to provide as well as prepare the food and clothing. This form of marriage — capturing a wife or taking her from someone else — still exists in various forms in North America, but it isn't legal.

Somewhere in the past the fathers of the girls realized that marriage offered an opportunity for business. There are women in areas of Africa to-day who were bought by their husbands as suitable wives. An attractive strong young wife is worth so many half-starved cattle. The father will sell her to the highest bidder and by so doing he will keep alive a custom that goes back many thousand years.

There are a few tribes in which the business deal works in just the reverse. The daughters are not sold to their husbands so much as the husbands are persuaded to take them. The young man is offered a number of cattle to take the young lady as a sort of door prize. If the young bachelor gay can play the game for long enough he may get married with enough cattle to assure a reasonable living in the future.

The trend is rather downward in the history of marriage. Early man *captured* his wife often in competition with other men. The outcome was based on a trial of strength. Later he *bought* his wife in competition with other men. This was a trial of wealth.

There then appeared the brokerage system. This meant that

marriages were arranged by the parents or by a third party paid to do so. A popular example at the moment is Kwame Nkrumah who, when he wanted a wife, wrote for one to his friend Gamel Abdul Nasser. It seems that Nkrumah has been more successful as a husband than he appears to have been as a politician. Marriage by arrangement is still done in Canada and in the United States — but it is done in a most sophisticated manner. It isn't so much an arrangement by the young people as it is a matching off of the parents so that each set is satisfied of the equity on the other side.

The wonder is not that so many of these pre-arranged marriages in the past were unhappy, but that so many of them were very happy indeed.

We have progressed to the stage now where a man cannot capture a wife or buy one, nor can be get one on request — unless he is a friend of Nasser. Each person must find a mate for himself, and that is what most married men believe they have done.

In our society a person gets married because he falls in love with someone who loves him. This is the most complex stage in marriage arrangements. A wife is not any longer a part of the man's personal property like his house, or car, or television. The husband belongs to his wife just as much as she belongs to him.

And here there is introduced another complication. In all primitive forms of marriage only the man needed to be satisfied with the marriage, but when a young couple gets married where both have freedom and dignity, both must be satisfied that they have met the one with whom they want to spend their lives.

ADULTERY

Now, we have been talking about marriage because this commandment is concerned with the sacredness of married life. In the act of adultery one of the parties is married, but the other may not be.

In his day Moses saw that some men in the desert were acting like the cuckoo bird: they were leaving their chicks to be raised in another man's nest.

The wife in Moses' day was the personal property of her husband — his most personal property — therefore, if another man broke up a home by an adulterous arrangement with the wife, such a person was, of all men, the most despised. The official punishment was death for both guilty parties, but the punishment was rarely carried out.

In the Scriptures and in our society adultery occurs in many forms:

(a) There is the casual affair that is neither planned nor protested. It takes place because a momentary temptation is strong. The partners to this form of adultery frequently excuse themselves by saying that "everybody does it" and "what does it matter anyway?"

It is the sort of thing that happens when husbands trade the keys to one another's homes, or when they end a party by playing a sort of Cinderella game. In this game every man has a shoe belonging to some woman other than his wife, and he must find the one to whom it belongs and become her partner.

(b) There is the cruel triangular affair in which either the husband or the wife is cheating, and the other one knows it. It is accompanied by tears, tension and heartbreak. In this arrangement there exists about every cruelty known to human nature. It is one of the most difficult types of adultery with which any professional person has to do, and it is more frequent than any of us imagine.

(c) In those States where divorces are granted in a light-hearted way, there is what is called legal adultery. In these situations people change their partners as we used to change seats in Musical Chairs. In this sort of atmosphere people speak of marriage as if it were a purchase contract for a car. "I will keep it and pay for it IF it works". And that idea, "if it works", opens the door to suspicion and selfishness. Each side is anxious to get what he can from the marriage, rather than seek to determine what can be put into it. And even with the best intentions flesh and blood remain as much flesh and blood within the marriage as they do outside of it.

(The problems of young unmarried people are not included in adultery, but they are none the less serious for that. Nature doesn't play quite fair with young people. Many of them are ready for the physical aspect of marriage in their early teens, but they must wait for marriage itself for eight or ten years. The Church is greatly concerned for them, but not under the category of adultery.)

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MARRIAGE

In 1946, an English magazine invited its readers to enter a contest for the best revision of the Ten Commandments. Each entry was carefully read, and finally the Editor concluded that Moses still had the advantage. The hardest one of the Commandments to rewrite proved to be the one on adultery. Here the contestants failed miserably — their

comments deteriorated into bits of advice, leaving the underlying principle untouched.

Men have always blamed the women for adultery, whether the men involved were married or not. Even the Jewish Church put the blame on the women, and the Christian Church — without understanding the New Testament — did the same thing.

"The woman tempted me" is the excuse of the man in the Bible. One day some social and religious leaders rushed up to Jesus holding a helpless woman. They said to Him "Here you are, Master, she was caught in the act of adultery. The law says she ought to be stoned to death. What do you say?" It seems strange to us that they should have been so much on the spot but were unable to produce the man as well as the woman. Anyway, it doesn't matter, for Jesus turned the tables on them and said "Let the one who is not guilty throw the first stone", and after they had slipped away He said to the woman "Go your way, your sins are forgiven, and don't do it again."

Whenever a man looks lecherously at a woman, said our Lord, whenever he is thinking of her in terms of the things he would like to do, he is guilty of adultery. If it is only lack of opportunity that prevents adultery taking place, the man is as guilty as he can be. In His conversations on adultery He was talking to men, and making His point without hesitation. The men were interested in their self-satisfaction and He denounced this as less than worthy of a man. Lust, He taught, is *a certain view* of woman rather than *a certain act*, and the one is first cousin to the other.

Jesus pointed out, and Paul did the same, "that although men are tempted and are not always free agents, they are still more free on the whole than the women are." Women, he knew, were responsible too, but He directed all of His remarks on adultery to the men. He expected them to protect the women, not to take advantage of them.

The Christian view of marriage is a high one. It begins by stating that both the man and the woman are the children of God. They begin as two separate God-given personalities that merge together to become one in marriage. They do not become one merely through a union of their bodies, but through their love for one another and for God. The relationship between a man and a woman in marriage is compared by St. Paul to the mysterious relationship that exists between Christ and His Church.

CONCLUSION

It is one of the paradoxes in life that some things demand a complete surrender of the self before one really becomes a person at all. Marriage is one of these situations, and the surrender involved is second only to the surrender of the Christian disciple to God.

The Commandment that prohibits adultery keeps before us the ideal in every marriage. But to those who are inclined to be selfish there is no commandment strong enough to regulate their lives. The only force strong enough to prevent adultery is love; love for one another, in which case obedience to the will of God is spontaneous.

XIII

WORSHIP OF FREEDOM

The Very Rev. Lewis MacLean, M.A., D.D.,
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Victoria, B.C.

Text: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more."
"I am a free man and own no master; but I have made myself every man's servant, to win over as many as possible."

1 Corinthians 9:19 (N.E.B.)

THE man who wrote these words believed in freedom. He knew what freedom meant. There is pride and appreciation in his declaration, "I am a free man and own no master" . . .

Paul enjoyed three freedoms. He was an educated man who had been a student in the school of the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel, thus he knew freedom from ignorance and superstition. He was a Roman citizen, and as such enjoyed political freedom. On a certain occasion in Jerusalem when the captain of the company of Roman soldiers stationed there had ordered Paul to be scourged, "Paul said to the centurion that stood by, 'Is it lawful for you to scourage a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?' " The captain asked Paul, "Are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes;" and the captain replied, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom (this citizenship)." Paul was a Christian — a believer in Jesus as God amongst men, the Saviour. In another of his letters, from which we read earlier, he exhorted his fellow-Christians to "stand fast . . . in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." (Galatians 5:1) Paul was free from slavery to sin, free from fear of death . . .

Freedom is foundation-stone in the structure of our North American

way of life. Whether we reside in Canada or in the United States of America, we have this in common — the founding fathers of our nations were nurtured on British freedom. Individuals may write or speak as they will of the differences between Canada and the United States; we have been, and continue to be, inseparably united in our devotion to FREEDOM.

At the Kiwanis International Convention, held in Portland the beginning of July 1966, the Governor of the State of Oregon, the Honourable Mark Hatfield, was one of the guest speakers. Speaking on the eve of Independence Day, he said: "We believe in liberty; we believe in it deeply. Our political institutions indicate that the trust of liberty has been given to us by God." He recalled the words from the Declaration of Independence: "All men are endowed not by the State, not by their fellow-men, but they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights". He drew attention to the words inscribed on the Liberty Bell at Philadelphia — from the Book of Leviticus —"Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." He quoted Abraham Lincoln's statement, made in 1858: "What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our fine embattlements of bristling sea coast, our army, or navy. These are not our reliance against tyranny. All of these may be turned against us without making us weaker for their struggle. Our reliance is on and in the love of liberty which God has planted in us. Our defence is in the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors."

At this same Convention I attended a workshop or study group dealing with a plan for teaching freedom to youth in our nations. I had given to me a down-to-earth attractive booklet, entitled "What is Freedom?", containing material geared to Junior High School level. In it freedom is defined as "your liberty to achieve your purposes (as long as you do not hurt others) . . . insured by laws that are the same for others." And this is followed by the assertion: *"Freedom is your most precious possession"* — won and protected and handed down from father to son by millions of freedom-loving people. The booklet then goes on to list sixteen of the freedoms built into the constitution and laws of the United States — freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly; freedom from search and seizures; testifying against self; freedom from discrimination against citizenship or the right to vote because of race or colour;

freedom to work in localities of your choice; freedom to go into business, compete, and make a profit; freedom from cruel or unjust punishments . . . etc.

There comes to my home a magazine entitled *Canada Month,* published in Montreal. In each issue printed above the table of contents is this declaration: "Because we believe that the strongest force for good in the world is the free and responsible individual, *Canada Month's* unremitting cause is personal liberty, guaranteed by responsibility on the part of those who enjoy it." The Editor of this magazine describes himself as a "Libertarian". He writes: "The foundation of the Libertarian's position is the instinctive need of all men to be free — to be free from oppression by other men, to be free to come and go as they wish, to be free to make their own choices in the conduct of their own lives . . . The Libertarian ideal knows no colour bar or racial hierarchy. Each man may be judged only by his own words and actions. A man who does violence to another must lose his liberty in a suitable degree and for an appropriate period."

"His liberty is more valuable even than his life. Thus the notion 'Better Red than dead', if it held any logic, would be rejected by the Libertarian, who would assuredly rather be dead than a slave, but, more logically and more hopefully, as well, he will strive to be both alive and free. And he knows that he cannot be free in a communty of slaves: so he seeks the freedom of all as an assurance of his own freedom." (June, 1966).

Now, I have reason to believe that all of us would understand and applaud Paul's satisfaction in being "a free man"; we would say, "Amen", to Senator Hatfield's assertion: "We believe in liberty"; we would approve of an intelligent program such as Kiwanis International is advocating, for the educating of youth to understand and value freedom; and we would agree that the Editor of *Canada Month* is championing a worthy cause in "personal liberty, guaranteed by responsibility on the part of those who enjoy it".

All of us, in varying degrees, know the VALUE OF FREEDOM. On this particular Sunday I have no thought of "preaching to the converted" on this theme. I ask you to consider not "freedom" in which "we all believe"; but rather, *"should we worship freedom?"* . . .

This statement appears in the booklet to which I referred: *"Freedom is your most precious possession"*. Do you accept this "as the truth and nothing but the truth", in the context of present-day freedom marches"?

. . . . *"A man's liberty is more valuable even than his life"* — states the Libertarian Editor of *Canada Month* (which sentiment Patrick Henry of Virginia expressed in the immortal lines, "Give me liberty or give me death") . . . What do you make of this as you read the accounts and see the pictures of death in Viet Nam?

Is freedom — this valuable thing freedom — to be considered as being of *supreme* value, to us as individuals, to human society? Is the *worship* of freedom a dangerous thing? . . .

Almost a century ago James Russell Lowell wrote a poem entitled "The Present Crisis". It began:

"When a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad earth's aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to west,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of Time."

"When a deed is done for freedom" — how many such deeds have been reported speedily round our world in recent years! In Asia to-day and in Africa to-day how many people in under-privileged and oppressed nations are feeling their souls within them "climb to the awful verge of manhood" . . . But is FREEDOM enough? What is the explanation of what has happened in the Congo?; of the present situation in South Africa and Rhodesia?; of revolt in Ghana, in Nigeria? We must ask similar questions with respect to many countries in Asia; yes, and enquire what is the real situation with respect to the American Negroes' march to freedom? . . .

As I see the task of the Christian preacher today, he is to wrestle with such considerations as these, and to share with those who will listen to him our human problems and the God-given direction to their solution — not that he has pat answers but because he knows that the Spirit of truth will lead to-day as in days past those who are concerned, and think, and seek divine wisdom.

To-day I must remind myself and all those who are lovers of freedom of what freedom is and implies.

"We know what freedom is" — you say. FREEDOM is the very opposite of slavery — bondage. When the Negroes in America were released from serving their masters, they were FREE. When a man is discharged from jail or from hospital, he is FREE. When a boy or girl leaves home with its restraints upon personal liberty imposed by

parents, he or she is FREE. In a land such as this we have many freedoms. No external coercion; no restrictions. Things are different under a dictatorship — *here* we may go where we will; we may do — within limits imposed by the welfare of society — what we like. *For this freedom* — we say — *we were created men!* However, there are those whose thinking on the subject of freedom has carried them no further than the thought that it consists in release from restrictions and coercion, and some of these persons assume that therefore freedom means release from obedience to law in general. The old rules and restrictions and sanctions that governed life — in the home, in business, in society — these are outdated. "No more bondage — freedom at last!"

We have been seeing since the end of World War II, and continue to see, the disastrous consequences of the worship of freedom — freedom misunderstood . . .

True freedom is freedom FROM something and freedom FOR something.

This will be illustrated and underlined in our thinking as we recall the Biblical account of the deliverance of the Hebrew people from Egyptian slavery . . . .

Exodus, Chapter 8, Verse 1, reads: "The Lord spake unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him, thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me." God's Magna Carta is in two parts . . . First, "Let my people go" — here is freedom from coercion, restriction, imposed law, bondage. But this is not all — "Let my people go THAT THEY MAY SERVE ME". Freedom FROM restraints is at the same time freedom FOR voluntary service of the Highest. True freedom is composed of these two inseparable elements.

The Old Testament account of the emancipation of the children of Israel shows that their freedom *from Egyptian bondage* was more quickly and more easily won than was their fitness for the free life. Read again the story of their forty years wandering in the wilderness, of their failure to understand in any real sense what this new life was all about, of their longing to return to the "fleshpots of Egypt". Here we have graphically portrayed what happens to any people who emerge suddenly from bondage into a free existence of self-determination: they must be educated not only in the mechanics of government but in the principles of justice and righteousness, honesty, service, etc. For freedom is deliverance FROM the slavery which is a denial of the possibilities and glories of humanity *into* a kind of living which is FOR things right and good and

satisfying — a willing obedience to the enduring principles of life, which means the realization of our true humanity. "Let my people go, THAT THEY MAY SERVE ME".

How do things stand with respect to freedom in our freedom-loving nations of Canada and the United States? This is the question with which I confront you. What is reflected in our Governments' policies? *What good use* have we been making of the freedom which is ours, which we have valued so highly that we did not hesitate to sacrifice the finest of our youth in two World Wars?

What do we see as we read the story of our own lives as individuals? No man, no government agent, lays his hand upon your shoulder forbidding you to do the things you want to do so long as they do not encroach upon the well being and liberty of others. What do you DO with your liberty?

As we face this question — you and I — let us seriously enquire as to whether we use our freedom to serve the God of love and righteousness and truth who has created us for freedom and permits us to enjoy freedom. Let us look again at Paul, and see in him an inspiration and a pattern for our living. This man was really a Christian: he really lived by the spirit of Christ . . . He said: *"I am a free man, and own no master; but I have made myself every man's servant to win over as many as possible."*

XIV

THE CHURCH AND POLITICS

Rev. Paul Stirling, M.A., D.D.,
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* *Sermon delivered to the St. Andrew's Society of Toronto*

MY subject this morning is 'The Church and Politics' and my text the last five words of the New Testament lesson, 'Fear God. Honour the King (1 Peter 2, 17.) I hasten to say that discussion of the monarchy does not come into this little talk. I hope I know my duty, and mind my manners better than that. I use the word 'king' here as does St. Peter as representing constituted authority — in our case a living symbol of freedom and of our truly glorious heritage.

'The Church and Politics' then, and 'Fear God. Honour the King.'

When I look back on the period during which I was 'being brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' — a duty most parents present have solemnly promised to discharge to their children — I recall that much of this instruction was conveyed in wise and pithy sayings. Thus, 'Always say please and thank you' was the first, and 'Ladies first' (if I remember rightly) was the second. This might well be so, for the distaff side of my family has always been strong-minded. Very shortly after that came *'noblesse oblige'* which was explained as meaning that the only patent of true nobility is service. I know this came very early on because I well recall that my father's exposition of it to his Sunday School caused an incident that will probably amuse some at least of the members of our Society. He was illustrating it with the motto of the Prince of Wales 'I serve' (*Ich dien*). 'Can any of tell me what *'Ich dien'* means? he asked us children. A hand flew up and a small Glaswegian

said, 'It's the Scotch (his word not mine) for eighteen.' As time went on the collection of these pithy sayings, counsels or orders (our Text being among them) gradually increased, and gradually impressed themselves on our minds and consciences. I have been grateful for most of them and tried to live up to most of them ever since.

Some people these days, perhaps particularly the young of Yorkville and the like, would dismiss the lot as a bunch of out-worn 'shibboleths'. All I can say in reply is that they too are so conditioned, but that some of their 'shibboleths' such as 'the world owes me a living' are even more out at the elbow.

However there was one such saying impressed on us later, (in the Divinity Hall of the Established Church of Scotland to be precise) which I now feel was not altogether a 'good thing', and that was 'No politics in the pulpit.' I can see the force of it of course and have more or less complied with it, but I realise now that it made my generation of ministers behave in the pulpit as a lot of idiots.

Now here I hope there may be one of two reactions, either 'Come, come it surely isn't as bad as that', or 'Well, you seem to be remarkably complacent about it'. If I seem not so disturbed as I should be at being called an idiot — even by myself, it is because I am using the word in its original sense. What follows will be Greek to some, indeed to all, but that is because idiot is a Greek word and so is politician. Originally they meant (and I quote Liddle and Scott verbatim) POLITIKOS — befitting a statesman, or like a citizen'; and IDIOTES — 'one in a private station as opposed to one taking part in public affairs'. From this two things may be deduced first, (a mild joke — and I don't see why ministers shouldn't have a little fun now and again) apparently in those well named 'good old days' it was impossible for a man at the same time to be a politician and an idiot; and second, we ministers of the old school in keeping our lips sealed have, as I said, been behaving like idiots.

Why have I broken this silence now? Chiefly because recently in the course of conversations (not initiated by me) men and women of all ages, and of all political parties, have been vehement in voicing their alarm and despondency over the antics on or about Parliament Hill. It's not just being 'agin the government' which is healthy; but disenchantment, discontent, with Parliament in general. I am not going to turn my new found freedom into licence by proving my point by naming personalities or parties, but will merely indicate three 'straws' (which, as you know, show the way the wind blows).

(1) Years ago I learned by heart (from the *'Lays of Ancient Rome'*) Macaulay's poem about Horatius keeping the bridge, the excellent one in which occurs the situation not unknown to many of us who have been in a rough house when "Those behind cried 'Forward', and those before cried 'Back'." In this poem there is a couplet,

'And none was for a party
And all were for the state'.

At the time I said to myself, 'IF, as is implied, the then state of Rome was the converse of this, i.e. All were for a party, And none was for state, then one can quite understand the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'. The other day I listened to a political party broadcast (a thing I have rarely done, being 'idiotic', you see) and the speaker ended 'So we shall continue to do our utmost, not only for the party, but also for the good of Canada'. What is wrong with this sentence?

(2) I nearly had a rear end collision last week, because the car in front of me had a poster on it saying, 'Vote for So-and-So. He's honest'. The implication is that others are not. Now if his statement be correct — this is shocking. If his statement be false, then it is even more shocking.

(3) One needs no special qualification or test — such as knowledge of international affairs and political economy, or excellence of character — to run for Parliament. All that is normally required is nomination by some party and an ability to pay the deposit. And, further, the remuneration is very, very attractive. As far as this latter point goes, the somewhat naive explanation given by those who have raised their own pay is that 'the country won't get the best man otherwise'. My answer to that is that you may get the cleverest, and (subject to their limitations) the most astute men that way, but it has very little bearing on getting the best.

Not to go further (in the words of our lesson 'Not using my liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as a servant of God') it would appear that what is needed in this sphere as elsewhere is a little more charity, a little less selfishness, and a lot more moral stamina. The Christian Church has a vested interest, albeit vicarious, in furthering these very objectives. But some may say can a Church have any real influence on the Government of a country, can legislators be persuaded to take Christianity seriously?

Strange to say the only Protestant country in which this happy situation prevails even to a limited extent is a country without a Parliament of its own — Scotland. I take the opportunity this occasion affords of describing this phenomenon at a little greater length than I perhaps other-

wise would. The voice of the Church is on occasion very clearly heard in Scotland, owing to a number of factors.

The Church of Scotland is truly a National Church. The latest statistical statement I have of confirmed members of the three major denominations in Scotland is: R.C. 37%, Anglican 3%, and C. of S. 60%. Its supreme court is truly representative, embracing such divergent callings as Dukes and Shop-stewards, Professors and Shepherds. There is of course no qualification for membership of the General Assembly save being an Elder in the Kirk, but while all the commissioners may not possess an equal amount of ability they are all men of integrity and character, otherwise they would not have been, elected first by their congregations, and secondly by their Presbyteries (N.B. two elections to get in). Further, it is an entirely non-profit making concern for those elected. Moreover they do not thrust themselves forward as candidates, but in many cases have to be almost bullied before they can be persuaded that it is their duty.

Possibly because there is no Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Press and other media of communication pay a tremendous amount of heed to what is said by the various committees of the General Assembly which deal with national and international affairs. Not infrequently their findings are printed on the front page of the national newspapers and its own published findings are very carefully studied by many in public office. Further, the Sovereign's representative there as well as being a Churchman is also usually a man of great influence outside the Kirk, to give one example only, John Buchan, First Baron Tweedsmuir. I would be the first to admit that the Church of Scotland does not influence politics as much as Christians would like but at any rate it shows that such a liaison is possible as well as desirable.

But what about the Church and Politics here in Canada on the threshold of our own one hundredth Anniversary. Here the situation is much more complicated. We may not have the 'two and seventy jarring sects' of which Fitzgerald sings but we do have a very great number of such, and do they 'jarr'? The answer is not to be found in some colossus of a Church (which may or may not emerge) the great wealth and huge numbers of which would compel the Government to take notice of its views. The Church of Rome occupies this position in several countries and the influence it exerts (as some of its own clergy admit) almost invariably ceases to be Christian and becomes 'Ecclesiastical', which is something else again. I have done a fair amount of research in this

matter of the Church and Politics ever since I decided on this little talk and the results have been meagre. Those who are pundits in the matter deplore the ecclesiastical influence I have just mentioned and say that the Protestant influence should be more spiritual, but none of them says how this is to be achieved. Also the only common factor the authorities seem to have is that they all repeat in some form or another the saying that 'moral decay means political decay' No one would quarrel with that but it is not very helpful.

What I have to suggest, taking it for granted that we believe in Almighty God as revealed by our Blessed Lord and Saviour, is a deliberate and planned infiltration into politics by men of Christian principles, who will take their principles with them to Ottawa, and this on such a scale that their presence there will be clearly felt.

That means that we Christians must make all constitutional efforts to see that our representatives from municipal to federal level are practicing Christians. But, it may be objected, this is not realistic. Suppose in any constituency one must choose between an upright non-Christian and a merely nominal Christian whose integrity is doubtful, must one vote for the Christian? By no means as things are. But it is your duty to do what you can to see that a good Christian is nominated by your party for every post. That means that more and more able Christians must take part in politics, both in volunteering to run for office and in campaigning for such as do run. There must be no 'holier than thou' attitude about the matter, no suggestions that 'politics are a dirty game' put forward as a barrier. If they be dirty then they must be cleaned up. It may take years to do this but we must start NOW. I am not for a moment suggesting a 'Christian' political party, but I am suggesting that we must find Christian men and women to represent us not matter under which political banner.

I know that this is neither a startling suggestion nor is it likely to have quick results and so is going to be a 'hard-sell' to a country and a generation which venerates these things. Furthermore, it has nothing in it to stir the blood such as the call of Garibaldi or Churchill's 'Blood, sweat and tears'. I know, too, that if this *were* a call to arms there would be no lack of volunteers. Can we not see that this is of as great if not greater importance?

Some mornings about 5.30 (I think it is) when I can't sleep any longer — a legacy from service in the East; and feel it is too early to get up — probably *anno domini;* I listen to the radio — with an earphone. Of late, a man has been talking about plans for our centennial. A military

spectacle, mountains hitherto unscaled to be climbed, the canoe trip of early voyageurs to be re-enacted, and so on. He ends up with 'What are you doing for the centennial?' This, or so it seems to me, is a curious mixture of authority and embarrassment. This may be purely subjective but I interpret this as showing that the speaker like many of us feels that we need something authoritative to fortify our morale, or cure our *malaise*, and that perhaps these things are a little superficial, like some early efforts of mine to cure a deep-seated joint disease with Sloan's liniment or Eliman's Embrocation. I may be quite wrong about the speaker's feelings but I am sure that you will agree that the clinical assessment is reasonably accurate.

I have long since ceased to be dogmatic in the pulpit so all I now do is to say, "If you are not satisfied with the way things are at present please do consider this plan." I believe that here, as elsewhere, we do need a cure. Perhaps under God this is it, or at least part of it.

XV

CITIZEN OF CANADA

Rev. A. Lorne MacKay, B.A., D.D.
Central Church, Hamilton, Ontario

Text: "Thou shalt bless the Lord for the good land which He hath given thee." Deuteronomy 8:10

AT first glance it might seem a bit out of place to speak on such a subject from a church pulpit. Yet, there is ample biblical basis for such a theme. The Old Testament has many references to the land and the nation and frankly recognizes the living relationship between the nation and the people of God. In the New Testament the apostle Paul states unequivocally the general principles of the duty of being good citizens and the responsibility to serve the commonweal. As one who took real pride in announcing that he was "a citizen of no mean city", Paul, in his letter to the Romans, makes it abundantly clear that there is a real duty of Christian obedience to the powers that be and that good citizenship takes its place among the virtues which can properly be associated with the new life in Jesus Christ. And as we heard in the Scripture lesson this morning, Jesus, who loved his nation, set forth a fundamental principle when he declared that we are to "render unto Caesar the things that are Casear's, and to God the things that are God's." Ah, yes, there is ample biblical justification for a preacher to speak on the subject of citizenship. Indeed, as will be indicated shortly, the recognition and devotion to spiritual values represents one of the really basic elements in the stature and permanence of a nation and hence a vital requirement in good citizenship.

The theme of citizenship is one which calls for deep thought and serious consideration in our day. We are rapidly approaching the one

hundredth anniversary of Canada's existence as a nation and one would normally expect that the anticipation of this important milestone in our nation's life would draw all Canadians closer together in common happiness and shared pride. Yet, for many of us, it is a sobering and disturbing fact that seldom if ever has our nation seemed more divided than at the present time. The concept of "separatism" — whether it be the firmly held creed of a small but vocal fanatical minority or a deliberate and unworthy device used to gain a desired political advantage — it is a distressing, and even frightening, fact in contemporary Canadian life. The continuing power struggle between provincial rights and federal authority, together with the strident appeals of sectional interests and the deliberate selfishness of groups which seek their own interests without a thought for the good of the whole, all add to the ever-present danger of disunity and are potentially dangerous enemies to Canadian unity and Canadian greatness. Granted that in as large and diversified a country as Canada some of these things are to be expected as normal; and granted — hopefully and prayerfully — that some of the disturbing elements in the contemporary Canadian context may be but the growing pains of a nation still seeking its real identity, nevertheless I would have to say that never during my lifetime have I sensed a greater uneasiness about the future of Canada than I do today. Deeply puzzled and often inarticulate, many individuals are inwardly fearful that our unity as a nation is even more seriously threatened than appears on the surface.

Because of this; because there is always the danger that feared possibilities may gradually be acquiesced in as an easy escape from a present dilemma; and because silence can make possible the very things we dread most, serious and thoughtful men and women should constantly recall and examine their privileges and responsibilities as citizens. Alert and responsible citizens are always the most precious assets of a nation.

With that in mind, let me set forth, in simple and familiar terms, some of the things which I am convinced must be present in the mind and heart of any person who claims to be a citizen of Canada.

1. TO BE A CITIZEN OF CANADA MEANS THAT WE ARE POSSESSED OF A DEEP AND ABIDING LOVE FOR OUR COUNTRY AS A WHOLE.

When we speak of citizenship we rise above the local, and the provincial, to the national. We have our homes in a city or town, our residence in a province, but our citizenship is Canadian. We are Canadians and I believe this should engender in us a sense of love for *all* of Canada

and a kind of mystical response to the nation as a whole. In my book, there is no place for a rigid regionalism which turns its back on the rest of the country. This does not mean that there cannot be some favourite spots which are very dear to us — those of you who know how I look forward to my holidays on Prince Edward Island will know what I mean — but this in no way subtracts from our sense of being part of a glorious entity which is summed up in the name "Canada" and which should call from us warm feelings of love and pride and deep emotion.

Unlike our American neighbours, we Canadians are inclined to shy away from voicing our affection for the land in which we live. We have, as Hugh MacLennan once put it, such a talent for avoiding the dramatic that we often escape even the notice of our friends. We have a habit of appearing solemn when we are only serious.

While I recognize that it is possible to go too far in expressing one's love for one's country, I think we Canadians err in the opposite direction. Without any tinge of jingoism or narrow nationalism I believe we should not hesitate to show our pride in and love for our great and wonderful country. It was this conviction which made me rejoice when I read an editorial written by James Lamb, Publisher of the *Orillia Packet and Times,* entitled "The Canada I Love; an Unfashionable Testament." Let me quote part of it:

> "I love Canada. *Macleans Magazine* assures me that no Canadian loves his country, and a thousand critics inform me that there is no such thing as a Canadian, no separate and distinct Canadian identity. I'M ONE . . . I love Canada. The Americans think I'm a Limey and the English think I'm a Yank, but I feel wise and superior in the States and young and vigorous in England, and I wouldn't trade my country for both of them. Oh, I know the Americans have more money and the British have more poise, but I like to think that Canadians combine the best features of both their ways of life.
>
> I love Canada . . . I have crossed the Yukon and trod the lonely beaches of the Queen Charlottes; felt the Chinook's warm breath across prairie snows, boiled lobster above the Fundy tide-line and picked blueberries on the bare hills above St. John's. It is a magnificent country, the most richly varied in climate and scene in all the world, home of a vigorous and warm-hearted people, a country to be proud of. I am a Canadian."

He is right, you know. From the peach-covered hillsides of the

Niagara Peninsula to the tundra of the Arctic, from the great Atlantic breakers on the coast of Newfoundland, across the pastoral industrial central provinces to the dry clean air of the Prairies, and over the Rockies to the moist Pacific slope, Canada is a great and beautiful country. This land is our land, this is the land of which we are citizens.

When we realize the vastness and beauty of this land; when we realize the rights, liberties and benefits for which the name Canada stands; when we take seriously the values and benefits of our Canadian way of life, there must surely take possession of us a deep and abiding love for our country as a whole. Don't be ashamed of such feelings. Don't be afraid to express them. Such love can help to strengthen and unify our country. It is a mark of a good citizen of Canada.

2. TO BE A CITIZEN OF CANADA MEANS TO BE IMBUED WITH A DEEP LOYALTY TO OUR COUNTRY AND ITS WORTHY INSTITUTIONS.

It seems to me that this, too, is an area for thoughtful concern on the part of all of us. Rightly or wrongly, I get the uneasy feeling that many of our cherished institutions which have played a notable role in the greatness of our country are being undermined in our day, either through carelessness or by deliberate intent. I sincerely hope I am completely wrong but it behooves all of us to examine closely the events of our time and to be certain our loyalties are in good repair. In the midst of necessary changes which are, of course, inevitable in a still developing nation, we must never forget that life in the present takes on a profounder meaning in the larger context of time which our noblest traditions recall. The ideals and principles which have been hammered out upon the anvil of history and which have entered the very fibre of our nation must not be surrendered to expediency — political or otherwise. A vigilant loyalty is a prime necessity to responsible citizenship.

In this regard I place in the forefront and as the epitome of the necessary loyalties of Canadian citizenship a devoted loyalty to the Crown. It is a moving sight to see a newcomer to this land take the oath of citizenship and swear allegiance to the Queen. One wonders if we who ordinarily do not take such an oath because we were fortunate enough to be native born can truly appreciate the intensity of emotion which must be present in such a moment! At any rate, whether by special ceremony or by right of birth, our loyal allegiance must always be extended to the Queen — the Queen of Canada.

Let this be said: Loyalty to the Crown can be and is the greatest

single unifying factor in our Canadian life and it is only those who seek to destroy our unity who would willingly cut the bond joining this nation to the Crown. The Queen is the unimpeachable figure of all that is good in government and the Crown is a symbol standing above differences in creed or party. I may differ with my neighbour in political allegiance; I may differ very radically with him in terms of religious belief; but in our common loyalty to the Queen I can stand beside him in perfect harmony as a fellow Canadian. When St. Augustine described a nation as an association of reasonable beings bound together by common agreement as to the objects they love, he might very well have been describing the unique unifying influence of the Crown, the person of the Queen, the spirit of the body politic. Loyalty to the Queen is a prime necessity of genuine Canadian citizenship and I for one will never consent to any tampering with that loyalty. I trust the day will never come when Canadians fail to experience a deep inner emotion when they join voices in the words "God save the Queen".

Loyalty is many other things, of course. Respect for law, a high concept of the rights of others, a safeguarding of democratic rights, an appreciation and cherishing of liberty. Loyalty is not a static thing — it is not just a word which has a nice sound. Loyal citizenship means *participation* — it means getting out and wrestling with the needs and problems of our nation's life. It is something to use effectively and wisely, to cherish and protect. As Voltaire once put it: "Let's cultivate our garden."

3. TO BE A CITIZEN OF CANADA MEANS TO GIVE VITAL RECOGNITION TO RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL VALUES.

Coming from a Christian pulpit on a Sunday morning this may sound like special pleading, the sort of thing you might expect a preacher to say. But it is far more than that. It is rather a simple statement of the verdict of wisdom and history. The world has known twenty-one civilizations. Out of this twenty-one, fourteen have already disappeared. The thoughtful historian studying the decline and fall of these civilizations was constrained to remark: "Down they came, one after another, and all for lack of righteousness." At the end of ten volumes of historical survey, Professor Toynbee has said: "The entire story of man on earth has no meaning at all except a religious meaning. There is no hope except in the vast increase of spiritual religion."

The seers through the ages have steadily proclaimed this truth. "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord." "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people." "Where there is no vision

the people perish." In his classic statement, Jesus made it abundantly clear that when God is dethroned for Caesar, Caesar's throne will not long stand; but when earthly power is supported by citizenship loyal to God, it will endure. Here is where the Church plays a part and in which as Christians we share.

The Church is the voice of the nation's conscience. This spiritual culture, this inward force which creates and sustains the best things in civilization, is the greatest power a nation can have. Our past is permeated with the vital struggles of men inspired by religion and conscience. When religion decays and spiritual values decline or are forgotten then all of life, political and social, loses that depth and range that can only come from the attempt to grasp the ultimate ends of human existence. Other peoples in history have organized themselves for defence only to discover they had nothing worth defending. If we disobey our spiritual heritage, precisely what are we anxious to defend, and how much *is there left worth defending?*

The hundredth birthday of Canada as a nation should be a time for reflection. It should be a time for our leaders to remind themselves in the words of Jesus that "a man could have no power at all except it were given him from God." It should be a time for all of us to remind ourselves that it is only those who fear the Lord, who see their lives as a trust from the sovereign God, who can be relied upon to be disciplined, upright and dependable citizens.

We live in a glorious land and it might be said to us as was spoken long ago: "Thou shalt bless the Lord for the good land which he hath given thee." The realization of this fact should make us conscious of our privileges and responsibilities as citizens of Canada. Citizenship is not to be taken for granted. Citizenship needs a periodic rededication if it isn't to lose its significance. There are many things which will enter into such rededication which I have not dealt with here but high on the list there must be the spirit of a people possessed of a deep and abiding love for our country as a whole; there must be the presence of a great, unswerving loyalty; there must be a vital recognition of and willing devotion to religious and spiritual values. These are the vital things in the practice and philosophy of one who is a good citizen of Canada.

Faithful in these things, we in our generation will be doing our share toward bringing into being the better world of which all good men dream. We will then transmit our handiwork to future Canadians, in the confi-

dence and faith that time will merely wear away the dross of it, and that what is worthy will be preserved in an even greater and more glorious Canada.

XVI

ALPHA AND OMEGA

Rev. Scarth Macdonnell, B.A., B.D.
Stanley Presbyterian Church
Westmount, P.Q.

Text: *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. . . . And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*
Revelation 1:8, 17-19

REVELATION is a strange and tantalizing book. To most ordinary people it has always remained practically a closed book, a sort of hidden mystery that defies comprehension. It has frequently been a subject of great curiosity to certain types of religiously inquisitive people. There has been a widely prevailing notion among them that, if you could interpret it correctly, it would enable you to foretell the future; this idea is probably prompted by a number of passages such as those words in our text, *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.*

Now, superstitious people are always seeking after fortune-tellers; and this is always a form of idolatry. It is a desire to find a sort of security by means of faith in some supposed knowledge of what is going to happen — as if everything that is going to happen were unalterably fixed and determined. But, as Christian believers, we reject this sort of idolatry. Our faith is in Jesus Christ. Our security is to know in Him the living God, and

to know the fact that He has chosen to interfere with "what is going to happen" in order to bring about salvation for us.

Nevertheless, to us also this seems to have been a closed book. For a long time we have found it very difficult to hear what it is saying; it does not seem to speak to us. When you come to think of it, however, this is true of a good many other parts of the Bible too; and I think we must recognize that all parts of the Bible do not necessarily speak to us at all times. When God speaks to us through the Bible, He always addresses us in the particular circumstances of our practical contemporary situation; and there are times when we are unable to hear His voice in some parts of the Bible, simply because we are not "in the situation" to which He is speaking. I think this has been the case with the book of Revelation. I think that it has not spoken to us for a long time. I also think that it is going to speak to us again.

This book is written in a style that sometimes puzzles and discourages us. It uses a symbolism and a verbal imagery which belong to its own age and environment, and which we may find difficult to interpret with complete certainty to-day. But this does not really obscure what it is saying. It was saying very practical things in its own time and situation. It was speaking in a time when the civilization to which it belonged was sinking into a state of decline and degradation — and in a time when the Church was suffering a similar sort of decay, and undergoing a desperate struggle to exist. The Church was declining and decaying — partly because the worldly society of that day was rejecting Christianity and suppressing it — and partly because the Church was allowing itself to be conformed to that world society, and to be dragged down and demoralized along with it. This book was written to strengthen the faith, and to restore the confidence of that discouraged and despondent Church.

I think that to-day we have again entered into a very similar situation. There are the same signs of declining and decaying civilization, which appears to be moving towards disaster. And again the Church is weak, and discouraged, and demoralized — rejected and ignored by worldly society — and also participating in the moral decline and decadence of worldly society. I do not think that the signs of impending disaster are to be seen in the possibility that the war in Viet Nam will escalate, or that someone will irresponsibly explode a nuclear bomb. These are frightening hazards; but they may not be the most serious ones. I am thinking of other signs; I am thinking of the fact that young "punks" with

knives are openly scorning the law in this city of Westmount, of the fact that there is such internal corruption in our national institutions as to provoke more and more frequent investigations, of the fact that the government of our country has demonstrated its incompetence to govern — to the point of making itself a laughing-stock. I am thinking of the fact that our society is complacently accepting this state of affairs, because it has already largely discarded its religious faith, and because it is now in the process of discarding also its standards of moral integrity and responsibility.

In this situation the book of Revelation again speaks. It speaks to the Church — it speaks to us — so that we may understand the present condition of the world we are living in, so that we may understand the situation of the Church in the present-day world, and so that we may be strengthened in the faith by which alone we shall be supported. The book of Revelation says strong and unpalatable things in judgment of the world of to-day and the Church of to-day. It declares that the world will surely suffer the disastrous consequences of the course it is following — that a complacent and apathetic Church, which drifts along in the ways of this decadent world, will also suffer along with it — and that even the faithful Church will have to suffer too, both at the hands of a world that rejects it, and also for the sake of a world that it seeks to love and to serve. But the book of Revelation also promises that in this very situation the faithful Church will again discover with joy the saving power of the living God.

And this is the keynote of the book. The risen Lord proclaims to His Church, *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending . . . which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.* In case you are not familiar with the Greek alphabet, these words Alpha and Omega are simply the names of its first and last letters; and the figure of speech that is being used here is the same as our colloquial phrase " everything from A to Z". The Lord is proclaiming: "Everything from A to Z is gathered up in Me — the beginning and the end — the past, the present, and the future." And when He commands, *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter,* He is not giving the writer some sort of preview of future events; He is proclaiming the fact: "I am the Lord of all history — the past, the present, and the future — I am the Almighty." And therefore He also encourages the writer to lift up his head with confidence and hope, saying to him: "Everything that happens, no matter how fearful, is within My ruling and saving power." *Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that*

liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death.

In many ways, this is a fearful book; it speaks to a fearful situation. But this is also a joyful book; it proclaims a more confident hope than any other book of the Bible. (It is striking to observe how many of our hymns of joy and praise — how many of our anthems, too — have come from this book; it is needless to remind you that it is the source of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus.) This book was written to restore the faith and the joy of the early Church in a time of despondency and discouragement. Its promise was fulfilled to that Church. And when faithful men, guided by the Holy Spirit, gathered together the scriptures that form the New Testament, they resolved to include this book — because a time would come when it would be needed again.

I am strongly persuaded that such a time has now come. And this book can testify again today — to us who have ears to hear — that God is faithful, and that the promises of Christ are sure. You will recall how He also said to his first disciples, *There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; . . . men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; . . . and when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

XVII

IN PRAISE OF GUMPTION

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Text: Luke 16:1-8

SCOTLAND has produced many saints and scholars. One of the most remarkable — a man of deep piety and eminent learning — was John Duncan, Professor of Old Testament at New College, Edinburgh from 1843-1870. Professor Duncan, or as he was affectionately known by his students, "Rabbi" Duncan, was famous for his quotable sayings. It is reported that he once said to a group of students preparing for the Christian ministry: "Gentlemen, what you need are the three G's — Greek, Grace, and Gumption. If you haven't Greek, you can learn it. If you haven't Grace, you can pray for it. But if you haven't Gumption, the Lord help you!"

Gumption. What a wonderful word! Webster defines it as common sense, shrewdness; initiative and enterprise. It is what the French call "savoir-faire" or in our corrupted form "savvy". We find in the Four Gospels that our Lord was constantly commending this virtue. The merchant in our Lord's parable who found a pearl of great value and sold everything he had to buy it showed gumption. Similarly, the woman who swept her entire house to find a lost coin showed initiative and enterprise. But it is in the parable of the Unjust Steward that this virtue is particularly praised. An appropriate title for this parable would be "In Praise of Gumption."

Here is an intriguing story based in all probability on an actual occurrence with which our Lord was familiar. It is about an estate manager, a rather shrewd and crafty one. This man, our Lord tells us, was dismissed

for mismanagement. Knowing that he was too soft for manual labour and being too proud to live on charity, he saw clearly that friendship would stand him in better stead than cold cash. So he extricated himself from an impossible situation by a very clever plan. This is what he did. He called all his master's debtors and proceeded to write off a large portion of the debt each customer owed. Thereby, he placed these men under a lasting obligation to himself. Two examples are given: "How much do you owe my master?" he asked one of them. "One thousand gallons of oil," was the reply. "Very well," said the estate manager, "here is your new bill. You now owe five hundred." And to another he said, "What do you owe my master?" "One thousand bushels of wheat," the customer replied. "That's fine, now you owe eight hundred." In other words, the estate manager, looking ahead to the time when he would be unemployed, made certain of a roof over his head by making friends of these debtors. The evangelist Luke adds this comment: "And the Lord praised the unjust steward (and here we can translate) for his gumption; for the sons of this world are wiser in their generation than the sons of light."

It is this estate manager's gumption in coping with a crisis that is applauded and the applauder is Jesus himself. What Jesus is holding up for our attention and praise is not this man's rascality but his strenuous thinking and bold action in the face of an impending crisis. The point of the parable is that secular men like this estate manager — the sons of this world — take a realistic view of crisis and meet it with acumen and resourcefulness which religious people — the sons of light — would do well to emulate. When Jesus says, "The sons of this world are in their generation wiser than the sons of light" what he means is something like this: "Oh, if only my disciples would show as much gumption in God's affairs as the worldlings do in theirs."

Three other sayings follow the parable and each one seeks to interpret and apply it in a slightly different way. The first, "Use your worldly wealth to win friends for yourself" implies that we should invest our worldly possessions in making friendships that will outlast our riches. The second, "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much" teaches that the way a man conducts himself in small matters indicates whether or not he is capable of larger responsibilities. The third, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon," points to the truth that we must choose between the

idolatrous worship of mammon and the worship of the true and living God.

Although all these sayings follow the parable it is really verse eight that gives us the theme — the gumption of the sons of this world in contrast with the lack of resourcefulness of the sons of light. This is the way that John Calvin, that unexcelled expositor of Scripture, interpreted the parable. "Christ simply meant," Calvin writes, "that the children of this world are more diligent in their concern for their own fleeting interests than the sons of light for their eternal well-being."

Let us apply this truth first of all in relation to our lives as individual Christians and then in relation to the Church, the community of believers.

As individual Christians we have much to learn from the astute and resourceful way in which the sons of this world conduct their affairs. They exhibit a gumption which often puts us the sons of light to shame. P. T. Forsyth, a great English theologian and preacher, has made the accusation that the religious views of the average Christian "are of the most casual kind. He seldom really takes pains with the matter. He does not attend to it. His opinions are a sort of spontaneous deposit on the surface of his mind. If it were a business matter he would go into it. If it were a scientific question he would train his mind, and then examine. He takes business and science seriously. But his religion he does not."[8] Forsyth is right. It is not only that individuals apply themselves with more thoroughness and gumption to their business and professional work than to their Christian discipleship. They will devote more time and money and energy to reducing their golf handicap or mastering a draw shot in curling; that is, to their leisure pursuits and amusements, than they will to the service and support of the cause of Christ.

Yet surely we must give to spiritual matters at least some of the same effort we give to less important things. Here we need to ask ourselves a few questions. Young business executives slave day and night to get ahead. How much slaving is there in our lives for the coming of the Kingdom of God? Communists employ all the gumption at their command to bring in the classless society. How much boldness and imagination do we display that the Kingdom of God may come? Men and women prepare for their retirement by means of investment plans, annuities, insurance, and pension. Do we exercise similar care to put ourselves in a state of prepared-

[8]*Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, Independent Press.

ness for the future life. "If only you showed as much gumption!" Can we not hear our Lord saying that to each one of us?

If this parable has much to teach us as individuals, I believe it has equally as much to teach us as the Church, the fellowship of believers, the people of God in this new age. Jesus said in effect to his disciples: "You know you are like this estate manager who saw that he was going to get sacked. But the crisis which faces you is even more terrible. This man was shrewd. He read the handwriting on the wall. Above all, he acted. To be sure, his behaviour was inexcusable. But the important thing is that he acted boldly and resolutely with the purpose of making a new life for himself. For you, too, the challenge of the hour demands 'gumption' — everything is at stake."[9]

This is surely a parable for the Church in the new age. Those who take stock of our times tell us that we are living in the most catastrophically revolutionary age that men have ever faced. I know that each age likes to flatter itself by thinking that it is unique and quite unlike any age that has preceded it. This is a danger in evaluating our times. But I believe that if we err at all today, especially within the Church, it is not on the side of over but rather that of under-rating the profundity and magnitude of our revolutionary times.

The Church faces a crisis today because we seem to have reached the end of a stage of Christian history. We live in what some church historians are beginning to call, the post-Constantine era. The concordat between Church and State which Constantine established by making Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, is breaking down. In practical terms, this means that the Church is no longer at the centre of things. We must begin to see things as they are. The form of the Church's existence in public life is changing. More and more the Church is becoming a minority living in a secular culture, amidst political movements, economic activity, science and technology which are conducted not simply and solely by Christians. There are those who hail our era as the dawn of the true age of man.[10] Others, particularly those within the Church, fear the new age. But I am of the conviction that we should do neither. The estate manager had no illusions about his own predicament. He saw the critical nature of the situation and then acted boldly and resolutely. We, too, must see clearly and measure coolly the crisis which faces the Church and then display a bit of gumption. For as Karl Rahner has

[9]J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, S.C.M. 1963.

[10]e.g. Harvey Cox and others.

reminded us the new era into which we have entered is a "must" in the history of salvation. In and through it God will accomplish His purposes of redemption. The Church will be a minority but a significant minority. Christians will be Christians on the basis of personal decision and no longer on the basis of custom or established practice.

We have entered a new stage of Christian history, yet instead of showing some ingenuity in the day of her visitation and taking bold and imaginative action the Church has often been unmindful of what is going on. Most of us are familiar with the story of Rip van Winkle, the man who went up into the mountains and slept for twenty years. Many persons miss the significant point of that story. It has to do with the sign above the inn in that small New England town. When Rip left the sign had a picture of George III of England on it; when he returned the picture was of another George — George Washington, the first President of the United States. The significant point of the tale is not that Rip van Winkle slept for twenty years but that he slept through a revolution. Sometimes we, the fellowship of believers, give that impression.

Take an instance. We live today in a world that is becoming more and more secularized and more and more urbanized. As the title of a recent book puts it, we live in the age of "The Secular City." The real issue does not concern our approval or disapproval of this phenomenon. Whether we like it or not, urbanization has become the dominant form of our modern society. The statistics for Canada are interesting. In 1941 less than 55% of the Canadian population lived in cities. By 1951 this had increased to 62%. The figures of the last census, held in 1961, showed that 71% of Canadians lived in urban areas. It is safe to predict that by 1980 this figure will be well over 80%.

The problem that is presented to the Church by urbanization is not that we do not have churches where the great masses are. Most of the extension work of the Church has been in the large urban areas which have witnessed tremendous increases in population. The problem arises from the fact that on the whole the Church is organized and carries out her work along lines which she has inherited from a rural society and which in part are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the new urban society. As someone has pointed out, our Sunday-at-eleven cultus is timed to fall between the two milking hours of an agricultural society. A good number of our church groups are a hangover from the last century and they no longer serve the purpose they served in a predominantly rural society.

There is a need of gumption, of bold and resolute action. There is the need to experiment with new forms that are relevant to the new structures of modern society. There is, above all, a need for a more imaginative use of the laity. We now look upon the function of laity as assisting the minister in church activities. Increasingly, ministers must see their task as that of aiding lay people in making the Christian influence felt in all the structures of society.

Finally, the parable points out the need for the Church to anticipate the future. The estate manager did not delude himself into thinking that everything would turn out all right. He anticipated the crisis and by shrewdness and gumption prepared a new life for himself. This is what the Church must do. The biblical faith is basically a prophetic faith. It perceives what God is doing in His world and it calls upon the people of God to participate in God's action. This, surely, was the strength of the Protestant Reformation. As Roland Bainton, the Church historian, has pointed out, the Protestant Reformers believed that "God has a great work to do within the historical process and that men had no other task than to glorify him by serving as the instruments of his purpose." "The Eternal had written a drama in which they were to be actors."[11]

This can also be said of our Presbyterian forefathers in Canada. I began by saying that Scotland has produced many saints and scholars. Well, Canadian Presbyterianism has also had its great men. One thinks of such names as the Reverend Principal G. M. Grant of Queen's University, the Rev. John Black, minister of the Selkirk settlers, and Dr. James Robertson, Superintendent of Missions in the Western Provinces, who worked untiringly for the spread of the Christian cause at the time when the West was being opened. "The gambler, the rum-seller, and the strange woman," Dr. Robertson once wrote in one of his annual reports, "travel by fast express — the Church by slow stage. We follow when we should accompany or precede."[12] Here were men of vision, of resolute and bold action; men with gumption.

Well, what about us their spiritual sons? The Reformers took time by the forelock and brought into being the Protestant era. Our Canadian Presbyterian forefathers took bold and resolute steps to establish the Church across the wide expanse of this great dominion. Are we like them

[11]*Reformation of the Sixteenth Century,* p. 254 and p. 252. Beacon Press.

[12]Quoted by H. Keith Markel, in *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.*

out in front grappling with the lively issues and needs of the day? Or do we just follow when we should accompany or precede?

"And the Lord praised the unjust steward for his gumption." Christ is at work in our age, in the crises of our time. He is our Pioneer who goes before us and He enjoins us the children of light to follow Him, particularly in what He is doing in our world, to display some gumption, so that His great purpose of redemption may be accomplished in and through us.